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ABSTRACT

A study guide to American Indian Literature (English 367), a 3-credit hour correspondence course available through the University of North Dakota, contains eight lessons to be used with the following six textbooks: "Black Elk Speaks," "Carriers of the Dream Wheel," "Ceremony," "The Portable North American Indian Reader," "Winter in Blood," "In the Trail of the Wind," "Lame Deer, Seeker of Visions," and "The Way to Rainy Mountain." The first brief introduction to American Indian culture, stereotypes, etc., precedes the eight lessons. Each lesson contains a reading guide for the appropriate textbook, writing assignments, and additional suggested readings. A selected bibliography of American Indian nonprint materials, literature, and resource materials and a class handout conclude the guide. (AH)

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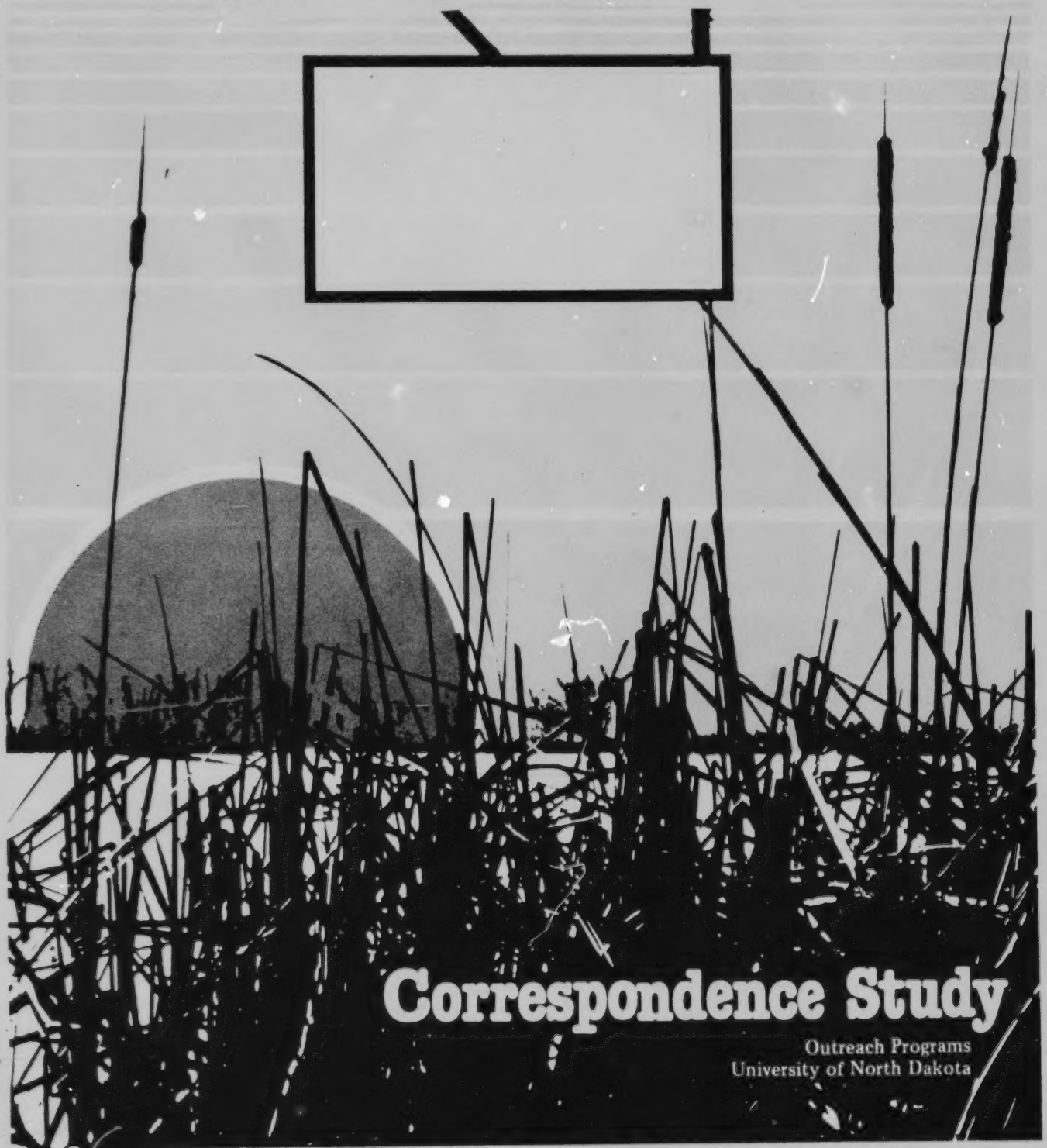

Correspondence Study

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UNIVERSITY OF NORTH DAKOTA
DEPARTMENT OF CORRESPONDENCE STUDY
DIVISION OF CONTINUING EDUCATION
Grand Forks, North Dakota

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ENGLISH 367
American Indian Literature

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LESSONS: Eight (8)
SEMESTER HOURS OF CREDIT: Three (3)

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FORWARD TO THE STUDENT

The Division of Continuing Education is happy to welcome you as a student in its Department of Correspondence Study. This makes you one of the many who have and are now seeking to further their education by means of the facilities which the University of North Dakota makes available to those whose circumstances prevent study on campus.

Through correspondence courses, the University provides continuing education by mail. Face-to-face classroom exchanges are lacking in correspondence instruction. There is possible, however, a distinct individual and person-to-person relationship between instructor and student. One of the merits of correspondence study is that it tests your ability to be self-starting and to persist without the necessity of another's supervision.

All of the regular lessons for this course are included in this syllabus. On occasion, however, the instructor may request that you do some supplementary work in the form of additional assignments or reports. **Written lessons should be mailed to us as they are completed, and in consecutive numerical order. No more than three lessons will be accepted during any seven day period.**

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Establish a work-study schedule that will enable normal course progress to completion within one year. **Please keep copies of all lessons you submit.** If the corrected lessons are delayed in their return to you, continue to submit lessons in accordance with your established schedule rather than delay course completion. Submit work regularly. Undue haste toward course completion makes for poor results in inadequately prepared individual lessons.

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You have *one* year in which to complete the course. (This includes satisfactorily completing all lessons which have been graded "Incomplete.") If you do not complete your course on or before that date you may elect to extend your course enrollment for six months by paying an extension fee of $10.00.

You may request a maximum of two six month extensions for $10.00 each. Therefore, if you do not complete the course before the first extension has expired, (which will be _____) you may request another six month extension.

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After having been enrolled for two years without completing the course you will be *automatically* dropped. If you still wish to take this subject through correspondence study, it will be necessary for you to re-enroll and pay the *full* enrollment fee. You may *not* resubmit those lessons which have already been graded by the instructor. In the event that the course has been revised you are to enroll in the *new* course and start at the beginning of the course.

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TEXTBOOKS

Neihardt, John G. Black Elk Speaks. University of Nebraska Press, 1977.

Niatum, Duane, ed. Carriers of the Dream Wheel. Harper & Rowe Publishers, 1975.

Silko, Leslie. Ceremony. New American Library, 1978.

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INTRODUCTION

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INTRODUCTION

ENGLISH 367--AMERICAN INDIAN LITERATURE

First, we would like to congratulate you for signing up for this course. You are to be commended for having the energy and interest to take correspondence courses in general, and this one in particular. This course will require a substantial amount of reading, writing and thinking, but the rewards are potentially great. You will be able to immerse your imagination in Indian culture while reading these materials, and perhaps you will come away from your experience with new insights and a fresh new outlook on life.

Contemplation of these materials can yield rich, ancient answers that are surprisingly applicable to contemporary problems; but the process of finding your own orientation to the Native American point of view may not be so easy. On the hopeful side, the fact that you have enrolled in this course probably indicates that you have an interest in Indian America and a basic respect for the Indian points of view, even if you don't fully agree with all of them. If you can maintain these attitudes, we think that we will be able to lead you into the intricacies of this material with few problems, and with good results for you. But first, let us give you some prefatory information.

When beginning a study of American Indian literature, one has to be prepared to deal not only with the literature itself, but also with several problems of background and context. Perhaps the single most basic problem is that there has been a massive lack of real, thorough communication between native peoples of this land and the European visitors ever since these two peoples first met. Further, one of the key aspects of the basic problem has been the American public's misinformation and ignorance about the magnitude, complexity, and sophistication of the historical and contemporary Indian cultures.

For example, let us briefly examine the public misconception about the magnitude of Indian population. In 1939, Alfred L. Kroeber, a highly respected anthropologist of his time, estimated the Indian population of America north of Mexico in 1492 to be nine-tenths of a million. Recent, more scientific estimates of the same population in 1492 range up to and above nine million, or ten times the population Kroeber estimated. The current estimates of the total population for the Americas in 1492 are comparable to the probable population of all of Europe, from the Atlantic to the Urals, at that time.[1] Among this native population of the Americas, there were between 1,000 and 2,000 separate mutually unintelligible languages.[2]

Understandably, there was a tremendous diversity among all these groups--but also a very complex set of underlying similarities, which collectively can be discussed in a general way as American Indian culture, much as we can discuss "Chinese" culture or "Western European" culture. What the above statistics tell us is that there was an immense and healthy civilization in the Americas before Columbus arrived. Researchers today postulate an initial series of epidemics (and, in some cases, outright slaughter) that wiped out millions of native inhabitants in the Americas, producing a low point or nadir of population in about the year 1650, from which the Native populations have been very slowly recovering. But for a variety of reasons, the depopulation process in the area north of Mexico continued until perhaps as late as 1890, when the U.S. Census figures posit a native population of only 250,000. (Though Dobyns used a nadir of 332,000 for 1930).[3] The official U.S. Census figure for 1970 was 792,730, but was closer to 1 million,[4] increasing to 1,418,195 in the 1980 census. The point is that the population decrease in the Americas was absolutely catastrophic; only recently has the Indian population begun to increase significantly.

Another problem area is that stereotypes of Indian culture and people have become so built into our society that it takes a conscious effort for the average American to step back and take a fresh look at Indian America. If you happen to be a classroom teacher, we highly recommend watching some of the better educational films currently available, such as More Than Bows and Arrows, which details the extensive contributions that Indian culture has made to practically all aspects of American society, from farming methods to political and legal theory, from art and music to climate-specific plant hybridization, and from pharmacology to psychotherapy. Most of these contributions have been obscured by a morass of self-justifications for the seizure of one of the most extensive tracts of real estate ever taken from one people by another in the history of man. This transfer of property rates with the establishment of the Roman Empire and the Medieval Moslem expansion around the Mediterranean in terms of pure size of the area taken. But in these latter two expansions, the native population largely survived, while in the case of Indian North America, for example, it is likely that 96% of the original native population of America north of Mexico actually perished.

The stereotypes present the Indian as essentially subhuman or inhuman, and sometimes even devilish. The inevitable underlying logic, as seen from a certain distance in time, seems to be that if the Indians are subhuman, godly Europeans are justified in taking their lands and reducing them to a subservient position. Needless to say, whenever Indian people have had a choice in the matter, they have not agreed with either the stereotype nor the seizure of their property and rights. Some of the historical Indian leaders, who must have felt they drove hard bargains when they signed over their lands, would be dismayed to learn that the treaty rights to health care, educational benefits, and staple rations they got in exchange for their lands now provide the basis of new Indian stereotypes of lazy, drunken bums on welfare. The stereotypes are still with us in many forms, and the student would do well to contemplate the

source and fairness of what he or she already "knows" about Indians. If you are in the educational field, an excellent media source on stereotyping is the slide-tape show Inside the Cigar Store: Images of the American Indian.[6]

Such media materials present visual images of the stereotypes; but if you let your imagination and memory examine your own experience, you will realize that our children's books are still filled with feathered savages, some friendly, some unfriendly, but usually stereotyped. The late movies on TV still show Indian warriors speaking broken English being defeated by John Wayne. When such stereotypes have dominated our thinking for several generations, it is probable that it will take several generations to substitute reality for the stereotypes.

Meanwhile, facts that substantiate the sophistication and complexity of Indian cultures are seldom mentioned. For instance, the constitution of the Iroquois League provided some key ideas for the American Constitution through its influence on Benjamin Franklin and the articles of cofederation. While the TV late movie Indians live in flimsy teepees, the actual diversity and comfort of past Indian housing is ignored. The Missouri River earth lodges were truly energy-efficient shelters, and the Pueblos are still being studied as excellent examples of passive solar design for both heating and cooling, designs that incorporate concepts such as the heat sink, natural convection ventilation, and common structural walls. In the field of agriculture and especially in plant hybridization, over 40% of the world's food supply currently comes from three plants first domesticated and bred up by American Indians (corn, potatoes and peanuts). The ancient Hohokam in present day Arizona created vast irrigation systems, as did Indians in Mexico and South America. Food handling and preservation among many or most tribes had been developed in ways that made it quite easy to put up a winter's supply of dried meat or smoked fish and dried vegetables. The Indians had been practicing successful fish and game management for centuries before Columbus. They were also using various methods of birth control to limit human population to the numbers that they felt their environment could support at the level of comfort and leisure to which they were accustomed. Indeed, some modern research indicates that many tribal cultures were able to provide the necessities of life in fewer than forty hours per week per person, allowing them to take more leisure time than many modern Americans are willing to take.[6]

If leisure is truly the basis of culture, perhaps the oral traditional cultures of the American Indians were and are much more sophisticated than has been supposed. There are several related aspects of oral cultures that deserve further investigation, such as the tremendous memory capacities that such cultures develop in their members, and the continual pressure to refine the philosophical and religious material of the tribe so that the essence of the people's ways and language can be preserved in interesting forms that can be easily remembered. By contrast, our society is developing a tremendous glut of printed information even in fields of specialization like religion where quality is vastly more important than quantity.

There are many many other interesting and significant facts about the magnitude, complexity and sophistication of past and present American Indian cultures, but since our space is limited, we will now move on to some of the relatively unknown peculiarities about the legal situations of contemporary Indians, Indian tribes, and Indian property.

Indian tribes were sovereign nations before contact, and they continued to be treated as such up into the early 1800's, when the U.S. Supreme Court declared them to be dependent domestic nations whose relationship to the federal government resembles that of a ward to its guardian. Since then, there has been a steady decline in the degree of sovereignty or independence exercised by the tribes, but the legal status of the tribes is still unique in comparison to other political or social subdivisions in the U.S.

During colonial and early U.S. history, the Indian tribes were acknowledged to have legal possession of most of the land area of the present-day U.S.; and the treaties made with the tribes typically provide certain guarantees and services to the Indian people in exchange for the cession of their best lands. Thus, in many cases, tribes traded their land for services such as health, education, and basic food supplies for as long as necessary; the tribal leaders did this because they knew that the "reservations" or land they were able to reserve for their own use were not capable of providing economic self-sufficiency for their people, and they knew their people would need both protection and help in accommodating to the new conditions. The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) was to provide these services to the Indian people. But the BIA steadily assumed more power until this supposed guardian and trustee of Indian lands and funds became a dictator which could not be abolished because it does help protect the tribes and does provide many services, however inefficiently.

Other strange aspects include "trust land" on the reservations. "Trust land" means that Indians own it, but the government is holding the title for the Indians. The practical result of this often is that the Indians cannot use the land. Instead, it is leased by the BIA to another party, oftentimes a non-Indian; and oftentimes for less than comparable non-reservation lands. In recent decades, when oil and mineral resources have been found on many reservations, the BIA has often leased the oil and mineral rights for much less than they are worth. Recent Indian affairs have been filled with controversies over who should control leasing of Indian land.

Even the basic ownership of the reservation lands is incredibly muddled. On some reservations, over half of the land is owned by non-Indians, and over half of the population is non-Indian. The non-Indian has full title (fee simple title) to these lands and can sell them at will; but trust lands owned by individual Indians cannot be sold or even mortgaged in the usual ways; they are under the control of the BIA. (Individual Indians can also own fee simple or fee patent lands which then follow normal rules and laws.) Again, simply abolishing the BIA or the

"trust" status is not the answer, since they do provide some degree of the services and protections promised by the treaties. Recently, many Indian tribes have advocated more local tribal control over the BIA, so that each tribe could do more to determine its own course of action. This concept of "self-determination" may be the best answer for the years ahead.

Another area of incredible complexity involves the question of who has legal jurisdiction on Indian reservations. Most tribes claim that they have retained most of the internal sovereignty or powers of self-government that they were recognized as having during the times the U.S. government was still negotiating treaties with them. But in actual fact, most tribes have not been fully exercising this power of self-government; so that in the area of law enforcement, for example, a series of laws and court decisions have eroded Indian powers of law enforcement and turned these powers of law enforcement and legal jurisdiction over to federal and state governments. The result is legal confusion and sometimes legal chaos on the reservations. The reservations are the only area of the U.S. where the race of the offender and victim changes the nature of the crime, the liability for it, the way that it will be tried, and the particular court that will try it.

The foregoing are only a few very general examples of the special legal and social relationships between Indian tribes, Indian people, and the various branches of the U.S. government that have been established by a long legal history. In the past, the U.S. people, and even the U.S. Congress in some cases, have had very little solid knowledge of the foregoing. In order for the gap in understanding between Indian and non-Indian to be completely bridged, the American public must be given dependable information, and more of it, about both Indian culture and Indian legal status.

There are many other areas in which public knowledge is simply inadequate to deal with the actual complexities of the Indian situation; for instance, only a few decades ago Indian children in boarding schools were being beaten for speaking their own language; Indian people were being kept from practicing their own religions; and many other attempts were being made to wipe Indian culture out completely so that Indians would acculturate into mainstream America. Today many young Indian people have been deprived of their right to learn their own culture and tribal identity, since the generations before them were subjected to such treatment. A lot of Indian culture has been lost due to such misguided efforts; yet today there is a rebirth of Indian culture taking place, despite of all these difficulties. The Indian literature that the following lessons cover is a vital part of both the historical record and the contemporary rebirth. We hope that by giving you a few samples of the problem areas related to the Indian situation in general, you will be better able to appreciate this literature; but perhaps the above samples will also make you aware that understanding even a part of the Indian situation can easily be a lifetime task. We wish you well in whatever quest for understanding you decide to embark upon.

NOTES

[1] William M. Denevan, ed., The Native Population of the Americas in 1492 (Madison, Wisconsin: Univ. of Wissonsin Press, 1976), pp. 1-12.

[2] Harold E. Driver, Indians of North America, 2nd ed. (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1969), p. 25.

[3] Denevan, p. 236, fn. 2.

[4] Wilbur R. Jacobs, as referred to in Denevan, p. 7.

[5] Film available through Cinema Assoc. Inc., 1977, color, 58 min.

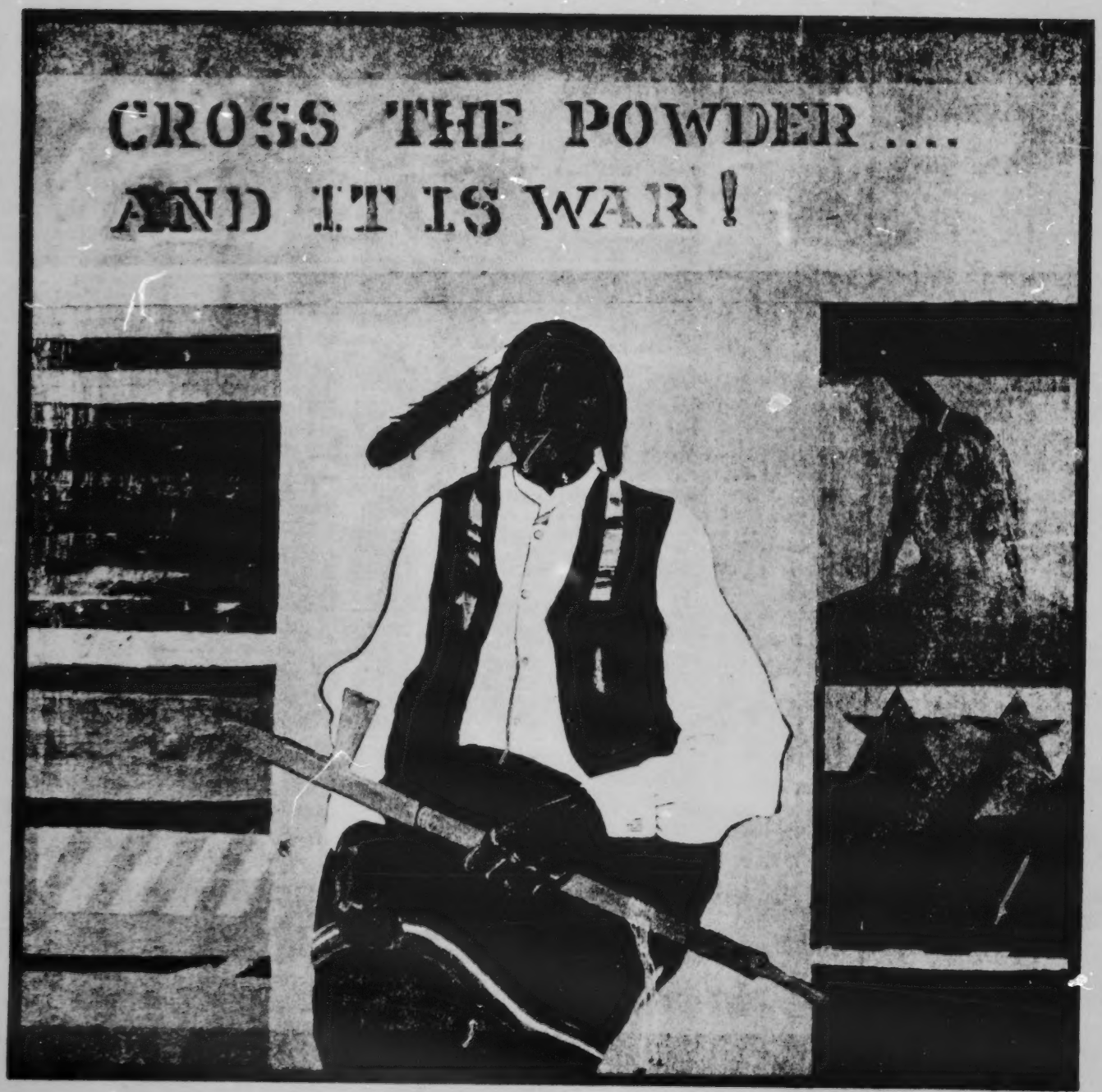
[6] Gretchen M. Bataille, ed.; available through Media Resources Center, 121 Pearson Hall, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa 50011.

[7] See, for instance, texts such as Robert B. Taylor, Introduction to Cultural Anthropology, Chapter 8, or Marvin Harris, Culture, Man, and Nature, chapter 10.

* Please do not be intimidated by the length of these lessons. If you take this course, you will find it is less difficult than it appears, and more enjoyable.

LESSON ONE

BLACK ELK SPEAKS



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Lesson 1: Black Elk Speaks

Black Elk Speaks is one of the "classics" of modern Indian literature, yet it also provides extensive insights into the ancient traditional ways of the Lakota (Western Sioux) Indians, among whom Black Elk was a Wic'as'a Wakan or holy man in 1931 when he worked with John Neihardt to create this book. The introductory material by Neihardt and Black Elk is excellent, yet there are many other aspects of Indian thought in general and Lakota thought in particular which could be helpful for the reader. Thus, we are providing a set of commentaries on each section of the book, along with many different writing options for you to think about and eventually to write about. (You should write three to five pages, or 1,000 to 1,500 words, on your choice of the questions which appear throughout the material in this lesson.) All page numbers will refer to the Pocket Books edition, even though the more expensive 1979 University of Nebraska Press version is a better edition with other useful accessory materials, including photos of people and manuscripts, a letter from Neihardt to Black Elk, and an introduction by Vine Deloria, Jr.

Preface, pp. ix-xiii

This preface, along with the postscript, describes how the book was actually written, with Black Elk and his friends speaking in Lakota, this being translated into English by his son, Ben Black Elk, and then written down by Neihardt's two daughters. Neihardt then composed the book from these notes. Undoubtedly, Neihardt's influence is felt in the book; yet the major part of the book is accepted by scholars as being quite directly from Black Elk himself. The notable exceptions, which we will mention as we come to them, are mostly at the beginning and at the end of the book. (If you are interested in pursuing this matter further, refer to the articles by McCluskey and Castro cited in the Bibliography at the end of this course.) Another interesting aspect of the preface is Neihardt's evocation of what has become part of the standard format of the "as-told-to" book about Indians, that is, the convention that Black Elk asked Neihardt to record the story for posterity because Neihardt was a special person, or had a close relationship with the narrator. In his book on Native American autobiography,[1] David Brumble does a good job of pointing out that most of this convention is pure fiction, a sort of window-dressing which we should properly ignore, but which also has become part of of the interesting bi-cultural format of these "as-told-to" books. We could personally add that in Indian culture there is often an unwritten rule against actively seeking converts, since ultimately each person must choose his or her own way; yet there is also often an implicit obligation to try to help anyone who is sincerely seeking spiritual knowledge. Both these tendencies and many others as well probably affected the relationship between Black Elk and Neihardt, but whatever other factors entered in, there undoubtedly was mutual respect between them.

Lesson 1

Writing Option #1: After completing this book, return to the preface and discuss what you feel Black Elk wanted most to communicate to future readers of this book.

Chapter One--"The Offering of the Pipe"

The opening paragraphs are Neihardt's (see McCluskey). But by the time we get to the description of the Pipe, its symbolism, and the legend behind it, we are firmly in the middle of Lakota culture. Black Elk is speaking from the "center" of Lakota belief, firmly immersed in his people's traditions; yet he is also reaching out to find new ways to deal with the modern world without abandoning the old beliefs. He is also reaching out through the poet John Neihardt to communicate in a profound way with the White race that has caused all the trouble, and perhaps he sees that attempt at communication in itself as part of the solution to the troubles of his people.

Black Elk Speaks begins with a pipe ceremony; in plains Indian culture, the pipe ceremony functions like the swearing in of witnesses at a legal trial by placing their hands on a Bible. The ceremony certifies that what follows will be true to the best knowledge of all those concerned. Like the Bible, the Lakota pipe has heavy theological implications which directly relate to the foregoing. In order to understand these implications despite the fact that we are speaking and thinking in modern English rather than traditional Lakota, it is possible to describe the pipe in the language of basic natural science, which can then be more easily connected with the Indian way of speaking about the pipe: The pipe is made of a special stone (catlinite) and contains within it a fire burning vegetation (tobacco), which then changes state, producing heat and smoke which are dissipated, vanishing back into a form hidden from human observation, though essentially still there. The pipe can thus be a "symbol" of all living creatures on this earth, all of which metabolize or consume other living matter through the fire of their metabolism, creating a good deal of heat or visible activity of some sort which eventually, through natural processes and finally through death, is dissipated, vanishing back into a form invisible to mankind. The most basic make-up of the pipe involves several "realms" of the natural world: stone, wood/leaves, fire, and air; in addition, animal and bird life forms are more specifically represented by the hide and feathers hanging from the pipe. In the Indian way of thinking, the pipe represents all these realms and the other aspects of the world which are hidden, mysterious and sacred, which can be referred to in English as the spiritual world or the sacred world. In the Indian way, the smoke is spoken of as being one of man's connections to the spirit world, a means of carrying prayers to the hidden wakan (holy) world which is all around us. The pipe is round, a Sacred Hoop itself, and it has lesson upon lesson built upon it in the oral tradition.

The legend of how Wo'ope, the Sacred Buffalo Calf Woman, brought the pipe to the Lakota people illustrates how the spirituality of the pipe helps to tie man closer to the earth rather than separate him from it. The hearty spiritual implications of the pipe are built firmly upon tangible, obvious and immediately observable aspects of the natural world.

Writing Option #2: Discuss the meanings of the Pipe as you learn them from Black Elk Speaks.

Chapter Two--"Early Boyhood"

In this chapter, Black Elk and several other Lakota speak of the early days when Black Elk was born (1863) and grew up. We learn that Black Elk first heard mysterious voices at age 5 or earlier and had his first vision when he was five. The reader is thus alerted that visions are to be very important in Black Elk Speaks.

Chapter Three--"The Great Vision"

This event takes place when Black Elk was nine years old, and it is a profound experience which can be studied in great detail and depth. For our purposes, we only want to create a context in which the reader can begin to grasp the overall implications. Black Elk's visions are his own personal experiences, but they are also firmly rooted in a context of traditional Lakota culture. We must remember that without the help of that culture and its intense interest in spiritual experiences, the visions would never have been transmitted to us. Thus, in order to come to terms with the book fully, the reader must try to experience and understand the Lakota "world view" expressed by Black Elk. I have found that a summary of the Lakota creation myths by J. R. Walker has helped me to re-create that world view in an intellectual manner. That account follows:

> Before there was any other thing, or any time, Inyan was, and his spirit was Wakan Tanka. Han was then but she is not a thing for she is only the black of darkness. Inyan was soft and shapeless but he had all powers. The powers were in his blood and his blood was blue. He longed for another that he might exercise his powers upon it. There could be no other unless he would create it of that which he must take from himself. If he did so he must impart to it a spirit and give to it a portion of his blood. As much of his blood as would go from him, so much of his powers would go with it.
>
> He concluded to create another as a part of himself so that he could retain control of the powers. So he took from himself that which he spread over and around himself in the shape of a great disk whose edge is where there is no beyond. He named this disk Maka and imparted to it a spirit which is Maka-akan (the Earth God).

> To create Maka he took so much from himself that he opened all his veins and all his blood flowed from him and he shrank and became hard and powerless. As his blood flowed it became waters and it is the waters.
>
> But powers cannot abide in waters, so they separated themselves and became a being in the shape of a great blue dome whose edge is at but not upon the edge of Maka. The powers are a spirit and the blue dome, the sky, the Great Spirit Skan. Inyan, Maka, and the waters are the world and Skan is the sky above the world.[2]

First and foremost, the world is alive and holy (or divine) in Lakota thought. This creator creates out of his own self, so that each realm and creature of the creation not only has the "spark of divinity" Emerson attributes to humans, but is literally part of "God." It is an evolutionary creation in a very profound sense in that all realms and beings in the universe proliferate from the primordial rock, who is also God. Each part of the universe has its Wakan aspect, and is a small part of the total multi-faceted God-head Wakan Tanka.

This awareness of the world as alive and sacred is essential to the traditional Lakota worldview, and similar theological beliefs are common to most American Indian tribes. There is a tremendous difference between this worldview and the "standard American" worldview expressed in an English language which characteristically separates subject from object, agent from action, and cause from result. In Lakota culture the ultimate unity of all things is strongly emphasized. As the mythology continues after the basic creation, four brother spirits, who are the winds, establish the four directions. Each is a person with his own attributes and temperament. Thus, for Black Elk, the four directions are assumed to be alive and active in the affairs of man and the universe, and they are always prayed to just as Christians might pray to the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. The Thunder beings are powers of the west, and, like the rest, they will sometimes manifest themselves and engage in communication with humans who are in a proper spiritual condition.

Writing Option #3: Compare and contrast the foregoing account of creation to the Genesis account of creation, trying to understand the implications of these creation stories for the cultures they are a part of.

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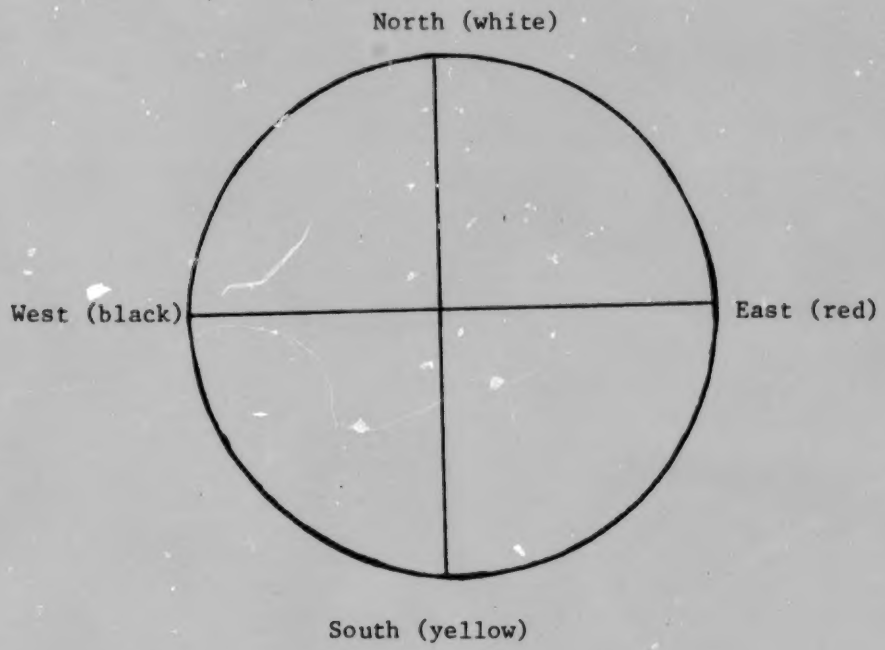
Black Elk's Great Vision is built upon and uses the symbols which belong to and are a part of Sioux religion, just like the cross, the lamb, the serpent and the trinity are parts of Christian religion and symbolism. If you are not familiar with these Lakota symbols, you will have to study the vision closely in order to understand it. I offer the following as hints which might help you. Most of the following is in the book; the colors, directions, and most of the other basics are described in a few paragraphs of the first chapter, "The Offering of the Pipe." (See also pp. 164-65.)

The Sacred Hoop, the universe, the Sioux people, the individual person's life, and the individual person's mind can all be the same as the central symbol, the "Hoop of the World" (sometimes called the Medicine Wheel, or the circle of the world, etc.) It is a circle with two cross spokes. When it is the universe, it is identified as follows by Black Elk/Neihardt:



When we are talking about the Sioux Nation, the hoop refers to the design of 1) their original homes, 2) the design of their whole "towns" or camps, 3) the design of the religious structures such as the Sweat Lodge and Sun Dance Lodge, 4) the spiritual and political unity of the people as seen in the council system or seven campfires of the Sioux, and in many other ways.

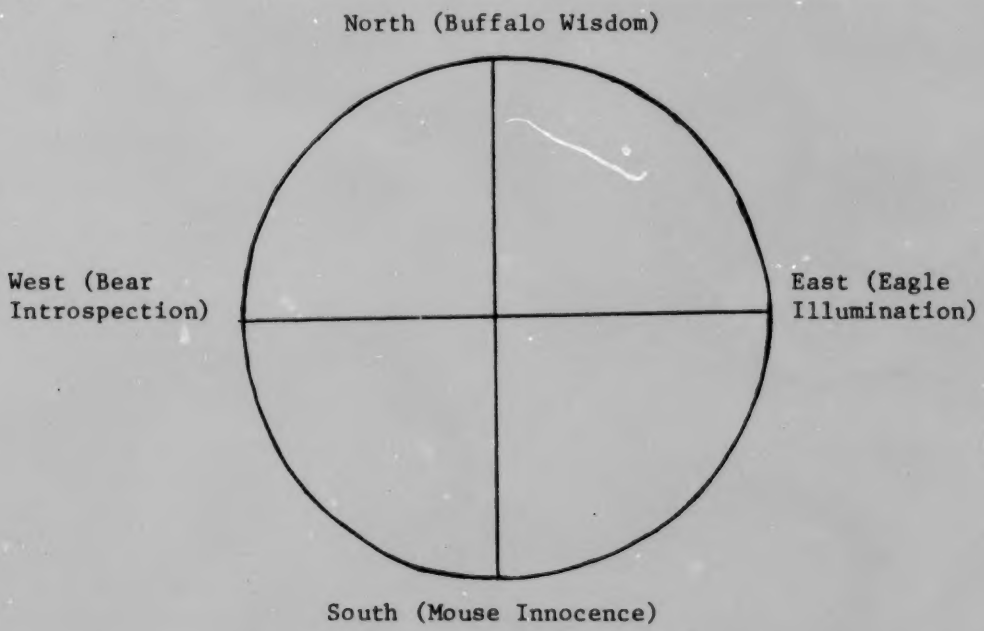
With reference to the individual's life, the hoop can mean his progress from birth to death. When Black Elk speaks about this change, he uses the image of four hills and four ascents. These are ages of the world. As ages of a man, they might be:

1. Infancy (East)
2. Childhood/Adolescence (South)
3. Adulthood (West)
4. Old Age (North)

As seasons of the year they would be:

1. Spring (East)
2. Summer (South)
3. Autumn (West)
4. Winter (North)

With reference to the mind of the individual and the people, I think you have to work that out yourself. One of the more controversial contemporary Indian authors, Heyemeyhosts Storm, uses the following meanings of what he calls the "Medicine Wheel":[3]



Many other interpretations are also possible.

The Great Vision itself can be seen to have four parts as follows:

1. The Horse Dance

   The life of each direction is expressed by horses dancing in the realm of the Thunder Beings. The sacred colors of the directions as Black Elk uses them are established here, and the order of movement around the circle is established as the same as in the pipe ceremony (West, North, East, and South). This order of movement is adhered to consistently except on page 26, where the omission of North is probably Neihardt's editorial error.

2. In the Rainbow Teepee

   Black Elk's spirit visits the six Grandfathers (West, North, East, South, Sky, and Earth) and receives a blessing or a healing power, or special knowledge (with several associated symbols) from each. He is given some examples of how these powers are to be used to heal, such as when he heals the sickly Black Horse of the West (which may be inner consciousness and emotional stability) with the herb of power from the North.

3. The Four Ascents

   This is the prophetic part of the vision, in which Black Elk is shown some of the sicknesses his people (and the universe) will undergo, and how they should be dealt with. Here, Black Elk is shown how he will have to use all the powers (and their symbols) that he has received to heal the terrible sicknesses that get progressively worse during each of the four ascents. The powers of the West are the powers to create and destroy; the cup of water is the means of creation between earth and sky, since rain does literally "create" new life on the earth; the bow (and implicitly, the arrow) represents the lightning, the power to destroy, which is the glance of the Wakinyan or Thunder-Beings. The Herb and White Goose's Wing are from the North and deal with purity and endurance, related to Winter and old age. The Daybreak Star (Venus) and the Sacred Pipe are from the East, and here refer to the power of rebirth of several sorts, including the power of gaining new insights. From the South come the Sacred Red Stick and the Nation's Hoop, symbols of the People's spiritual unity and vitality. He is shown how to heal the sick earth, which he guesses is afflicted by drought, and a sick village, which has lost its center. Then his people begin to disintegrate, losing their connection to the earth and other creatures, losing their center, and losing their sense of community.

3. The Four Ascents (Continued)

Finally they lose their medicine and symbols and are desolate. Then Black Elk is shown how the sacred herb will replace the bison temporarily as a center for the people, and then how the Black Horse of the West can be healed with the herb, as he was shown before. The Black Horse, which may be a new central consciousness or sense of new community spirit and a new sense of unity with all the universe, then provides a new center for the people. This section of the Vision then ends happily despite the desolation and misery in the third and fourth ascents. Thus, the structure of the Vision itself contradicts some of Neihardt's "hopeless lament" rhetoric about how the Nation's Hoop will never live again. The silly publisher's embellishments on the back cover and frontispiece of the Pocket Book's edition are shown to be even more false in their maudlin indulgence in the "Vanished American" stereotype, apparently done for the sake of selling a few more books to thrill-seekers. Indeed, we have here a powerful symbol of the physical proximity of Indian and non-Indian ideas in American culture and the strangely recurrent lack of real interpenetration of the two ways. The book jacket and frontispiece display a complete lack of comprehension of Indian things, and also deliberate exploitation of Indian culture for financial gain; but a few pages later we enter into the very heart of Indian religious experience.

4. At the High and Lonely Center of the Earth

In this last section of his Vision, Black Elk is shown the wider implications of the Vision, and of the Sacred Hoop itself, which includes all humans and all living beings. In order to truly follow the spirit of this Vision, one cannot be ethnocentric or even anthropocentric. All beings participate in the Hoop in its widest sense. Remember that all aspects of the Universe are alive, and all participate in the Divinity. After these events Black Elk is led back through his several stages of experience, and each message is reinforced. Then he returns to his earthly body and wakes up.

Writing Option #3: Work up your own outline of the events of the Great Vision, basing it on the text and/or the above interpretation.

Writing Option #4: Compare and contrast Black Elk's religious and mystic experiences with any other such experiences you are aware of from non-Indian religions and cultures.

Chapter Four--"The Bison Hunt"

This chapter covers the aftermath of the great vision, and tells how others in Black Elk's Lakota band reacted to these events. There is a very interesting description of how the large band moved from camp to camp in an orderly fashion, and how the buffalo hunt was conducted in a very ritualistic and orderly manner.

Writing Option #5: Comment on any aspects of traditional Lakota culture which particularly impress you in this chapter.

Chapter Five--"At the Soldier's Town"

Black Elk continues to have visions and premonitions which provide a suspenseful mysterious background for the history of Black Elk's Oglala band during his youth. The narrative is also interspersed with anecdotes like the story of Watanye, the man with sore cracked lips, who people were always trying to make laugh. Neihardt's smooth poetic style blends well with Black Elk's sense of humor and anecdotal fluency.

Writing Option #6: Discuss the interesting type of "living history" that one gets from Black Elk Speaks.

Chapter Six--"High Horse's Courting"

One of the strongest points of Black Elk Speaks is the amount of solid ethnographic information which is conveyed through anecdotes and episodes which are entirely enjoyable reading by themselves.

Writing Option #7: Discuss this humorous presentation of the courtship customs of the Lakota, and compare these customs to those of non-Indian Americans of the same time period as you know about them or imagine them to have been.

Chapter Seven--"Wasichus in the Hills"

This chapter covers from 1874 to 1876. We know from Chapter Two that Black Elk was born in 1863, and there are also periodic mentions of Black Elk's age, so it is easy to follow the actual chronology of the events described. The history is accurate, and we get a refreshingly different point of view on people and events like Custer, Crazy Horse, and the taking of the Black Hills. We also get interesting descriptions of Indian conventions of warfare such as the coup system.

Writing Option #8: Discuss the differences between this historical point of view and that encountered in most American textbooks. You might begin by consulting and identifying a history text or two.

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Chapter Eight--"The Fight with Three Stars"

Writing Option #9: Discuss the empathy that the reader develops with the Indians from reading about the military battles from their point of view for once. How does this view contrast with the usual one as depicted in popular movies, television programs, and Western novels?

Chapter Nine--"The Rubbing out of Long Hair"

History from the Lakota viewpoint continues, and the reader soon comes to respect the strength and accuracy of the oral tradition which made this book possible. Another feature which adds to the strength of the book is the constant references to the traditional songs, prayers, healing ceremonies, chants of the camp crier, and songs which were made up and sung to commemorate events like the defeat of Custer and his men. Despite the narrow Hollywood stereotype of Plains Indians as violent warriors, we come to realize through a book like this that the Lakota of this time period were a very artistic, musical, and rather jovial group who spent much more time developing what we now call the arts and humanities than they ever did fighting their neighbors.

Writing Option #10: Discuss this view of Custer.

Writing Option #11: Discuss the constant use of songs, ceremonies, and prayers among these Lakota people.

Chapter Ten--"Walking the Black Road"

At the end of this chapter, Black Elk is 14 years old, and his people are definitely having hard times, just as his vision had prophesied. The black road is the road of worldly difficulties in the vision, it is the road of war, struggle and desire for dominance, as opposed to the peaceful harmony and mutual respect symbolized by the circle.

This book can also give the reader an insight into the degree to which the Indian people themselves were torn apart and set against one another by the tumultuous events of this period.

Writing Option #12: Discuss the violence, war and chaos of this historical period as presented by this book and Black Elk's vision.

Writing Option #13: Discuss the White man's use of divide and conquer tactics and the effect on the Indians.

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Chapter Eleven--"The Killing of Crazy Horse"

Writing Option #14: Discuss the special gifts, abilities, and accomplishments of this famous Indian leader as presented here.

Chapter Twelve--"Grandmother's Land"

Black Elk is now 15 years old and is having more and more premonitions of danger and what non-Indian society would call psychic experiences such as hearing a coyote "speak" to him. We also come to realize through the narrative how hard it was for these people to survive the winter while they were being chased all over the plains, without a chance to put up meat and make preparations for the winter as they usually did.

Writing Option #15: Discuss the life of the Sioux people during these times.

Chapter Thirteen--"The Compelling Fear"

Black Elk is 16 that winter and continues to hear prophetic voices that summer. The next spring, after he turns 17, an old medicine man named Black Road tries to help him. Black Elk tells him about his vision, and Black Road counsels him to begin acting out his vision for the good of the people.

Writing Option #16: Compare these Lakota attitudes toward Black Elk's visionary experience to the attitudes of contemporary non-Indian America toward mysticism of various sorts.

Chapter Fourteen--"The Horse Dance"

The tribal spiritual leaders help Black Elk to act out the first part of his vision, the Horse Dance. It becomes a complete ceremony with many songs involving the entire village. On page 142, Neihardt gives the affair a platonic philosophical structure, with the real vision "yonder" in something very like Plato's Ideal World or like a distant heaven. We are told, "I knew the real was yonder and the darkened dream of it was here." This sounds very much like the Biblical Apostle Paul, himself a Neo-Platonist, saying, "Now I see as through a glass darkly, but then face to face. . . ."[4] This is probably Neihardt's way of understanding the Lakota metaphysics and as such, it is also a way for any mind imbued with Western Christian philosophy to begin to understand the same. In actuality, the Lakota version of the "other world" or the "sacred world" makes that world much closer, more accessible, and more of a direct echo or reflection of this world than is Plato's or St. Paul's "other world." But both versions certainly see many difficulties

in establishing communication between these worlds. The horse dance as performed by Black Elk's people does succeed in establishing such communication, as Black Elk makes clear:

> After the horse dance was over, it seemed that I was above the ground and did not touch it when I walked. I felt very happy, for I could see that my people were all happier. Many crowded around me and said that they or their relatives who had been feeling sick were well again, and these gave me many gifts. Even the horses seemed to be healthier and happier after the dance.
>
> The fear that was on me so long was gone, and when thunder clouds appeared I was always glad to see them, for they came as relatives now to visit me. Everything seemed good and beautiful now, and kind. (pp. 147-148)

During the ceremony, it rains just a little way from them, which they see as an expression of the friendliness of the thunder beings. The entire event seems to be very helpful for the spirits of both Black Elk and his people.

This chapter puts into motion a thought which can be seen as a structure or theme for the entire book: that is, that the great vision was given to Black Elk by the spiritual forces of the sacred world for the good of his people, and that it is his duty or obligation to put it into practice in order to help his people and indeed, to help all the creatures of the world. The vision prophesies a cycle of bad times to come, followed by a renewal of the people's unity and spiritual vitality that can be brought about with the help of the medicines and sense of structure and organization provided by the vision.

Writing Option #17: Discuss how Black Elk's task of putting the messages of his vision into practice in the life of his people could serve as the basic theme or structure of this book.

Chapter Fifteen--"The Dog Vision"

When Black Elk is 18 years old, in 1882, he is purified in the sweat lodge and embarks on his first hanblecheyapi, the ritual lamenting or crying for a vision which is often referred to as one's vision quest. Pages 152-154 give us the procedures used during the vision quest, and pages 155-157 give us a description of Black Elk's vision on this occasion. The vision involves dogs surrounded by butterflies; then the dogs' heads are speared by two men in a ritual fashion. The dogs' heads then change into wasichus' heads, perhaps suggesting the strong actions necessary to analyze, understand and deal with the wasichus in order to help his people.

Writing Option #18: Discuss the amount of time and energy that this Lakota society regularly invested in ritual, ceremony, and the pursuit of mystical knowledge. Discuss how this may have contributed to the low incidence of mental illness and maladjustment among intact and relatively intact tribal societies.

Chapter Sixteen--"Heyoka Ceremony"

This chapter is the acting-out of the dog vision in a pattern of ritual that was already well established among the Lakota. The vision and ceremony may refer to the various ways that the psychic unity of man can be split into pieces. One Side and Black Elk shave the right sides of their heads, showing their special relationship to the powers of the West, and the dog is split into head/spine and heart. The "Heyoka" or "Contrary," one who does things backwards or in odd ways, has been publicized in the novel and movie, Little Big Man, where a Cheyenne "Contrary" rode his horse backwards, washed himself in dirt, and similarly acted in non-conformist ways. The Sioux concept is very similar, and the Heyoka is often referred to as a special type of clown, who makes people laugh, but also has serious religious functions and a great deal of spiritual power. Many of the traditional American Indian cultures use clowns in their most sacred ceremonies, and it is felt that they help to emphasize the idea that everything in existence has two sides to it--good and bad, sacred and profane, serious and funny. Missionaries have often discouraged or forbidden the sometimes profane activities of the clowns, but supposedly today there is no more religious persecution like that.

Writing Option #19: Discuss the cultural differences and similarities between the Indian use of clowns and the White American use of circus or rodeo clowns.

Chapter Seventeen--"The First Cure"

This chapter begins with an eloquent statement about the Indian use of the circle. The style of this statement may be Neihardt's, but we can be assured that the content is Black Elk's, since every Lakota (and practically every American Indian) religious and philosophical commentator has expressed similar views. This circular aspect of Lakota thought continues very strongly into the present.

The main event of this chapter involves Black Elk, who is now 19 years old, using his powers to cure a young boy. In the process, he engages in some interesting discussions of ceremonial structure, procedure, and meaning.

Writing Option #20: Comment on Black Elk's idea that there are special powers in the circular arrangement because it echoes the structure of so many living systems in the universe.

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Chapter Eighteen--"The Powers of the Bison and Elk"

Black Elk makes several statements about how his Great Vision had to be performed for the people before he or anyone else could use the power of it. In fact, both Black Elk and the other medicine men helping him feel he had an obligation to perform the Vision and put it to use or put its principles into practice; not using it, he says, might have led to his early death (pp. 173-74). He also says that reciting all of it, or, in effect, giving it away, might have similar effects such as early death--but this latter statement (pp. 174-75) has much of the Neihardt poetic style, and it may contain a misunderstanding of Black Elk's degree of failure. There is little doubt that both Black Elk and Neihardt considered the effort to put the vision into effect to be the "theme" or structuring principle of Black Elk's life and of this book. It is likely, though, that they see the results in slightly different ways. Neihardt tends to emphasize the personal failure and the tragic sense of life, echoing the stereotype of the vanishing American Indian, which he believed quite strongly.[5] On the other hand, Black Elk seems to have a stronger and more stoic sense of fate; he seems to feel that the healing and renewal of his people is not meant to come about yet, meaning that the prophetic cycle of events has not been completed yet. Both would perhaps agree that the individual is relatively powerless in the hands of the spiritual forces of the sacred world, but Black Elk sees this powerlessness more as a function of having to wait for the proper time, while Neihardt sees it more as a permanent condition of mankind, in the mode of St. Paul's Biblical statement, "the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak,"[6] a condition alleviated only by the second coming, or some other drastic transformation or incarnation of the word. For Black Elk, the incarnation is, so to speak, constant, or, at worst, dependably periodic, as long as the earth lasts.

Black Elk has already performed the first part of his vision, and the second part, the receiving of power gifts in the rainbow teepee, perhaps in itself does not need to be performed. Instead, he now performs the "healing" parts of the vision, dealing with the bison and the elk. The bison has been, in the past, one center of the hoop; and the rolling over of the buffalo in the vision signifies a renewal. The ceremony seems to say that the people should keep the spirit and endurance of the buffalo even if they have to find another means of livelihood. The herb will help them understand, and they will endure. The elk ceremony concentrates on male-female relations, centering on the protection and nurturing of the female, literally the Sioux women and figuratively the Mother Earth. The elk is often associated with sexuality, so the ceremony emphasizes both physical and cultural fertility, the ability to renew through rebirth or new birth.

If one looks for completion in the sequence of these ceremonies, we find that the horse dance deals heavily with the West, as does the heyoka ceremony. The bison is placed in the East by Black Elk (p. 177; also pp. 23, 24), but that ceremony deals heavily with the endurance of the North; the elk is identified with the South, and the powers of growth of the South are emphasized in that ceremony. So there is a circuit of the sacred hoop apparent in the sequence of ceremonies, and this, too, may have been part of the thinking of Black Elk and his advisors. Black Elk temporarily considers the Ghost Dance as a ceremony that can renew the hoop or put it all back together again, one which could symbolize a true completion of the circle or cycle of life; but he later comes to feel he should have followed his own vision more steadfastly, instead of being influenced so much by the Ghost Dance.

Writing Option #21: Discuss the intricate sequence of one of Black Elk's ceremonies, trying to achieve the understanding that he says is the real key.

Chapter Nineteen--"Across the Big Water"

Black Elk joined Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show in 1886 when he was 23. He says, ". . . I thought I ought to go, because I might learn some secret of the Wasichu that would help my people somehow" (p. 182). He goes to New York and later to England, but he learns little of value, and becomes even more disillusioned with white society.

Writing Option #22: Discuss Black Elk's reactions to these new experiences such as the big cities, the shows, and the storm at sea.

Chapter Twenty--"The Spirit Journey"

While in England, Black Elk goes into a trance and experiences an out-of-body trip back to his home in America. Later, his mother tells him she had dreamed that he came home on a cloud.

Writing Option #23: Contemporary mainstream America tends to give little credence to most "psychic" experiences, while contemporary Indian America tends to accept these as part of life and also tends to be quite interested in them. Discuss why you think this difference exists.

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Chapter Twenty-One--"The Messiah"

This is Black Elk's description of some very hard times and the beginnings of the Ghost Dance.

Writing Option #24: Messianic religions, especially ones which present a "magic" solution or a "magic" leader like Iran's Ayatollah Khomani, are said to sometimes arise as a response to despair. Discuss this idea in relation to the Ghost Dance.

Chapter Twenty-Two--"Visions of the Other World"

Black Elk tries the Ghost Dance and has two visions of sorts which are very much like the Ghost Dance visions that many other people are having. He sees a renewed world, an earthly paradise, and in the second vision he also sees a savior with twelve men around him.

Writing Option #25: Black Elk later comes to feel that these Ghost Dance visions were "lesser" visions, apparently influenced by the intense collective desire of the people for renewal. If so, do you feel his suspicion about those visions discredits the possibility of his other visions being genuine communication with the sacred world?

Chapter Twenty-Three--"Bad Trouble Coming"

Black Elk describes the events leading up to the Wounded Knee Massacre.

Writing Option #26: Contrast this image of the plains Indians in 1890 with the image of these same people in most Hollywood movies. Discuss the reasons for this incongruous difference in image.

Chapter Twenty-Four--"The Butchering at Wounded Knee"

This chapter describes an atrocity which some military writers are still trying to claim was justified or at worst was an honest mistake based on the thought that an Indian military uprising was in the making.

Writing Option #27: Comment on your perceptions of this event and why it happened.

Chapter Twenty-Five--"The End of the Dream"

Here the aftermath of Wounded Knee is described. Black Elk and others bitterly desire revenge, but they have to give up after a few short fights because the women and children are starving and freezing. So they return to Pine Ridge, which is, in effect, a prisoner of war camp at this time.

The rhetoric of the last two paragraphs is Neihardt's, but the situation is very sad even without his emotional ending. While Black Elk may not have felt that the "dream" of his people was really over, this event was certainly a low point for the Lakota.

Writing Option #28: "Dreams" and visions have much more substance for the Lakota (and for most traditional Indian people) than for their White counterparts. Discuss this difference and the issue of whether this very moving ending is really consistent with the dynamics of the vision and Black Elk's worldview.

Author's Postscript

Black Elk and the group visit Harney Peak for a concluding ceremony, and Black Elk very clearly and fervently prays that the rebirth of his people promised in his vision might still take place (p. 233). It seems that he still has hope, and as Neihardt describes it, the Thunder Spirits seem to answer, responding with thunder and a light rain out of what had been a perfectly clear sky before Black Elk started praying (p. 232).

Writing Option #29: Discuss this seemingly miraculous event and your reaction to it.

Writing Option #30: Discuss any matter relating to this book which seems to you to be of substantial importance but which has not been covered by any of our questions.

NOTES

[1] David Brumble, An Annotated Bibliography of American Indian and Eskimo Autobiographies. (Lincoln, Nebraska: Univ. of Nebraska Press, c. 1981), p. 29.

[2] J. R. Walker, Outline of Oglala Mythology, taken from an untitled lecture and reprinted in James R. Walker, Lakota Belief and Ritual, ed. by Raymond J. DeMallie and Elaine A. Jahner. (Lincoln, Nebraska and London: Univ. of Nebraska Press, c. 1980), pp. 51-52.

[3] Hyemeyohsts Storm, Seven Arrows. (New York: Harper and Row, c. 1972), p. 6.

[4] St. Paul, I Corinthians 13, v. 12 (King James version).

[5] Based on several public speeches and interviews given by John Neihardt at the University of Nebraska during the early 1970's, and attended by this author. My memory of Neihardt's statements has been corraborated by others who also attended these events.

[6] St. Paul, Romans 7, vs. 21-23 (King James version).

LESSON TWO

LAME DEER

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Lesson 2: Lame Deer

Introduction

Lame Deer is a starkly realistic yet humorous and intensely personal autobiography of a modern Lakota (Western Sioux) Medicine Man who lived circa 1905-1977. The book was written from recordings of Lame Deer edited and rewritten by Richard Erdoes, a white American author born in Austria who has also written The Sun Dance People and other materials on Indians. First published in 1972, the book has been quite popular among casual white readers, Indian people, and professionals in Indian Studies. It probably has less overall intrusion by the non-Indian collaborator than Black Elk Speaks or many other "as-told-to" books. Lame Deer grew up in a very bi-cultural way, so he is completely familiar with both Indian and non-Indian American culture; this background gives him the ability to speak quite directly to an audience that includes Indian people both traditional and not so traditional, and non-Indians with various levels of ignorance about Indian culture. The result is a highly versatile book which is entertaining to read, yet continues to reward serious study. Each chapter of the book can be an Indian culture lesson in itself, if the reader will stop to contemplate the implications and ramifications of each statement.

For our purposes, we would like you to read the book for fun, and then contemplate a few chapters or even passages that you find you have a particular interest in. To that end, then, I offer the following set of questions and commentary which follows the chapter divisions of the book. The end results of your efforts with this book should be a three to five page or 1,000 to 1,500 word paper on your choice of the writing options.

Chapter One

It is rewarding to think about how Lame Deer chooses to begin his book, and to compare this opening to the one in Black Elk Speaks. Notice how once again the spiritual life and one's personal experience with the mysterious hidden forces of our universe are presented as being the key to the author's life and attitudes. Note also how Lame Deer is careful to mention how communal and sociable normal Indian life is, even though the vision quest itself is a lonely individual undertaking. Here again, as in Black Elk Speaks, the author chooses to give us some of the literal content of his vision, perhaps in an attempt to communicate how real and immediate the spiritual life is for a Lakota Wic'as'a Wakan or holy man and his people.

Writing Option #1: Comment on the way Lame Deer chooses to begin his book.

Lesson 2

Chapter Two

Lame Deer attempts to give us an idea of how he grew up. He uses a humorous wide-ranging style that refers to broken treaties, childhood experiences, Iktomi stories, and examples of how American society has come close to destroying the Indian cultures and peoples through its misguided and sometimes malicious attempts to "control" the Indians and change them into white men. Lame Deer seems to be trying to communicate to us how hard it was to arrive at where he is, yet how much fun it was when he could face it all with "Indian humor."

Writing Option #2: Discuss some of the things that Lame Deer thinks are wrong with the way that non-Indian society operates, especially in the area of raising children, compared to the tribal ways of relative freedom and lots of contact with relatives that Lame Deer experienced as he grew up.

Chapter Three

Lame Deer continues to use humorous anecdotes to good advantage. Here, he mixes criticism of white society's profit- (or greed-) based economic system with anecdotes about his early adulthood, the peyote religion, bootlegging during the prohibition, and joining the Army. A representative quote might be:

> Always, after working at a white man's job or a time of hell raising, I would go back to the old men of my tribe and spend many days learning about medicine and the ancient ways. Visions, a world beyond the frog-skin world, have always been very important to us. (p. 50)

Writing Option #3: Try to present a summary and discussion of Lame Deer's criticism of the White man's economic system, i.e., his "Green Frog Skin" mentality.

Chapter Four

Here, deliberately combined with bawdy, hilarious anecdotes of "Getting Drunk, Going to Jail," we find some very serious discussion of Indian spiritual beliefs, especially the attitude that the sacred and the profane belong together in the ritual and ceremonial life of a people. This is implicitly contrasted to the very different modern white attitude which strongly opposes mixing the sacred and the profane. The modern white attitudes do not tolerate the use of clowns at religious services; but the Indian attitudes still tend to favor this combination.

Writing Option #4: According to Lame Deer, what should a good medicine man be like? How does he use his own life to illustrate his ideas?

Lesson 2

Chapter Five

The most basic context for this chapter is the well-substantiated Sioux claim that the 1868 treaty is still the valid legal agreement between the U.S. Government and the Sioux Nation. That treaty, among other things, acknowledges Sioux ownership of the Black Hills, including Mt. Rushmore. The demonstration at Mt. Rushmore, which occupies most of this chapter, is fairly representative of how the American Indian Movement and similar non-tribal groups began in the 60's and 70's, to use demonstrations, marches, etc., in addition to the more conventional types of political activity employed for years by Indian tribal and inter-tribal organizations such as the National Congress of American Indians and the Tribal Chairman's council.

In this case, the protest concerns the government's bungling dictatorship and mis-use of power to "give away" Indian land and rights while it is supposed to be acting as protector of the same. This chapter also points out that the Mt. Rushmore faces are distinctly non-Indian expressions which, as tourist attractions, are symbolic of the way non-Indian American society even tries to make money from holy places.

Writing Option #5: Discuss your perception of Indian attempts to keep and/or regain treaty rights through political activity as presented in this chapter.

Chapter Six

This is a very philosophical chapter which relates directly to Black Elk Speaks and shows how Lakota religion and philosophy are alive and well today despite all the forces which have been seeking to destroy them.

Writing Option #6: Discuss some of the symbols and ideas such as the circle, Inyan the Rock, Umane, and the four directions, which have meant most to Lame Deer during his life.

Writing Option #7: What are some of the most important contrasts Lame Deer sees between Indian and White ways?

Chapter Seven

This chapter is in part a philosophical discussion of how the earth and all its creatures, especially the wild "natural" creatures, are alive, conscious, and have very special and distinct "powers." This set of beliefs is contrasted to the predominant non-Indian beliefs, which include the basic assumptions that the earth is inanimate or "dead," and that animals and all lower creatures do not have souls and have no special powers or even purposes beyond their ability to fulfill mankind's needs. Lame Deer talks about the growing power of ecological, environmental, and religious thought, especially among young people, and contrasts the power of natural creatures to the weakness of the specially hybridized animal and plant creations of the white man.

Lesson 2

Writing Option #8: Discuss some of Lame Deer's concepts of "power" of plants, animals, rocks, and other things. How does he say human beings are related to these "powers"? Can you see how man and these creatures are interrelated?

Writing Option #9: Discuss what Lame Deer says about different types of "medicine men": how they operate, and where they got their powers. (This topic is also covered in even greater depth in Chapter Nine.)

Chapter Eight

Here Lame Deer treats us to some lucid and candid talk about customs, beliefs, and other ways of doing things in the old days when the tribal culture was still relatively intact. Some of the subjects he covers include courtship, sex, marriage, childbirth methods, care of the newborn, divorce systems, relations with in-laws and other relatives, menstruation, homosexuality, birth control, abortions, and love potions.

Writing Option #10: Discuss his ideas about any of the above that interest you.

Chapter Nine

This chapter is a detailed discussion of the Lakota classification of "medicine men" and the different methods and powers of each. They include the herbalist, the seer, the conjurer, the clown, and the holy man or Wic'as'a Wakan who has been directly in touch with the sacred world and continues to derive his power from that contact. He talks about dreams, visions, and the Yuwipi ceremony in which the medicine man is tied tightly in a blanket in complete darkness in order to bring helpful spiritual forces into the room. He talks about how the ability to be a medicine man shows up and how Indian culture encourages its development, and where different sorts of medicine men get their powers. He mixes spicy anecdotes in with descriptions of different types of healing ceremonies and procedures from the traditional Lakota culture.

Writing Option #11: Discuss the different types of "medicine men," the origin of their powers, and their modes of operation. (Also see Chapter Seven.)

Writing Option #12: Compare Lakota ideas about "healers" and how they should be picked and trained, to contemporary non-Indian American ideas about how psychologists, psychiatrists, physicians, counselors, and other contemporary "healers" should be picked and trained.

Lesson 2

Chapter Ten

This chapter deals with the Lakota Sweat Lodge and associated beliefs and practices. This is a very readable chapter, yet it is absolutely packed with meaning. Much of the meaning, however, will probably only become available to you through contemplation of the subject.

Writing Option #13: Discuss the "Stone Boy" story which Lame Deer gives us for the origin of the Sweat Lodge, and how it demonstrates the healing power of the world or the ability of living things to "remake" themselves through water, air, fire and earth.

Chapter Eleven

This chapter is about the Lakota Ceremony called Yuwipi. It is a very detailed chapter which presents the same underlying ideas about how all things in the universe are alive, inter-related, and sacred (see also the Walker quotation given in the Black Elk Speaks lesson). According to these ideas, things are, in a sense, God; also, all things can, in certain circumstances, be addressed as "persons" with some hope of response from these "persons" who surround us and with whom our lives are intertwined. These ideas show up in each ceremony Lame Deer discusses, with just a little different emphasis, depending on the context and purpose. Parallels to the modern sciences are also easy to find (ecosystems, evolution, sub-atomic particles, pain and aging, mechanisms in man, etc.).

Writing Option #14: Discuss the above ideas as you understand them from Lame Deer's presentation.

Writing Option #15: Discuss the meaning of tying in the Yuwipi ceremony.

Chapter Twelve

This chapter goes into considerable detail about the Sun Dance: the ideas behind it, the ritual of getting and setting up the trees, the symbolism and stories related to the ceremony, and the different sacrifices and sufferings performed.

Writing Option #16: Compare and contrast the Sun Dance as described by Lame Deer to Christian ceremonies involving sacrifice.

Writing Option #17: Discuss why the B.I.A. (Bureau of Indian Affairs) and the military outlawed the Sun Dance despite the U.S. constitutional guarantees of free religion.

Lesson 2

Chapter Thirteen

This chapter is about the peyote religion, with Lame Deer saying that he no longer uses peyote because he has dedicated his life to preserving the oldest and best of the Lakota ways, while peyote religion is used as a new adaptation of Indian religion to modern life. Lame Deer explains that ". . . I want my visions to come out of my own juices, by my own effort--the hard, ancient way" (p. 206). He considers peyote useful for many other Indians, though, so he has Leonard Crow Dog explain the ceremony and its meanings.

Writing Option #18: Discuss how peyote carries on many of the old beliefs, but changes some things.

Chapter Fourteen

This chapter discusses the Ghost Dance Religion of the 1880's as an intertribal expression of similar ideas by Indian people in several different areas of the west. The military saw this religion as dangerous, but Lame Deer and his old friend Fool Bull say it was meant to create religious unity, not military unity.

Writing Option #19: Compare this chapter to what Black Elk says about the Ghost Dance and the events leading up the Wounded Knee Massacre of 1890.

Chapter Fifteen

This chapter deals with the Heyoka, the clown who does everything backward because he has dreamed of the Thunder Power. Lame Deer discusses how these clowns fit into tribal society and how their ceremony is performed. There is also a discussion of another basic Lakota idea, the unity and inter-relationship of good and evil or of the positive and negative forces in the universe, as symbolized by the forked lightning (or the forked tree).

Writing Option #20: Discuss the Lakota idea that laughter, like that provided by the Heyoka clown, should accompany solemn moments of sacred ritual and ceremony.

Lesson 2

Chapter Sixteen

This last chapter covers the Pipe and the Pipestone quarry. Lame Deer says that he has saved the most important thing until the last, and that all the other Indian beliefs can be expressed through the pipe; the bowl is circular to express the unity of all things, and the fire burns in it just as the sun burns or just like the metabolism of any living creature burns. The bowl is the blood of the people, the stem our backbone, and the smoke our breath which will rise to communicate with the sacred world.

He gives us several legends connected with the pipe and talks about the oldest pipe of the Sioux, the Buffalo Calf Pipe. He ends the chapter and book by praying that the pipe be used to create peace and uncerstanding on earth among this race of humans who seem dedicated to destroying each other and the entire earth.

Writing Option #21: Discuss some of the meanings of the Pipe that make the most sense to you.

Epilogue

Richard Erdoes has added his own ending to the book so that we get to know him, too, and realize what his true relationship to Lame Deer, to the rest of the Sioux, and to this book really is. His epilogue is, in many ways, a sort of testimonial to his own belief in the power, truth, and beauty of the Lakota ideas Lame Deer expresses in the book.

Writing Option #22: Discuss Erdoes' personality, beliefs, and motives for writing this book, as you understand them from this epilogue and from your reading of the book.

Writing Option #23: Discuss any other matter relating to this book which seems to you to be of substantial importance but which has not been covered by any of our questions.

LESSON THREE

THE PAST IN THE PRESENT

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Lesson 3: The Past in the Present

Reading Assignment:

N. Scott Momaday, The Way to Rainy Mountain

Instructional Notes:

One of the outstanding contemporary Native American authors is N. Scott Momaday. He is the author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel House Made of Dawn (like The Way to Rainy Mountain also published in 1969), poetry (see Duane Niatum's anthology for Lesson 7), essays, and a family biography The Names. He is also an artist, scholar, and teacher.

In an era in which cultural and ethnic "roots" are being searched out and celebrated, The Way to Rainy Mountain was a precursor and model of some subsequent books, but few of them have the grace and poetry of this short but rich book.

"Who am I?" is one of the greatly simple philosophical questions that humans ask of themselves. Where do I come from? Who were my forebears? What runs in my blood? What lies in my genes that I have inherited from my ancestors? What air did they breathe, what dreams did they have, what were their longings and sufferings? their joys and ecstasies? Am I my mother's and father's child? Who were my lost grand- and great-grandparents? Where is that long line stretching from my heart infinitely back to the past? Perhaps these questions are not of great interest to the very young or the other persons whose daily lives are very busy, but in the years of maturity when many humans have achieved some status--a job, a home, a family--and when they may have leisure for such reflection, the past can be endlessly instructive and rewarding.

This book is hard to place in the usual literary categories. It is not fiction, poetry, or drama, although it is written with the grace of belletristic literature. It contains some biography, some history, some folklore and mythology. Indeed, one edition of the book labeled it "anthropology"--which is the "scientific study of the origin and of the physical, social, and cultural development and behavior of man" (The American Heritage Dictionary, 1980). Substituting "imaginative" for "scientific," the definition would fit The Way to Rainy Mountain.

The three main sections of the narrative are "The Setting Out," "The Going On," and "The Closing In" which are framed by the "Prologue," "Introduction," and "Epilogue." The 24 sections of the body of the book are organized into three parts each, usually beginning with legend, then history, and then biography, thus moving from the impersonal to the tribal to the personal.

Lesson 3

Writing Assignments

1. How appropriate are the three section titles ("The Setting Out," "The Going On," and "The Closing In")? What themes or ideas do they suggest? (About 200 words)

2. As a history of the Kiowa people, this short book is obviously unusual, and much that could be recorded is ignored or treated briefly. What are some features or qualities of this kind of history that more conventional histories do not have? (About 200 words)

Instructional Notes (continued)

N. Scott Momaday is also a poet and novelist, and thus he brings to this narrative imaginative writing techniques, including the organization of very different materials (legend, tribal history, biography) by the repetition of themes, motifs, and symbols. For example, look at Section IV in which the following elements are present:

Legend	Tribel History	Biography
Subject: abduction, magical transformations of people and tree	Subject: first known home of Kiowas; its names	Subject: autobiographical fragment; observation of nature, including a red bird, a tree
Setting: mountains	Setting: mountains	Setting: mountains
Characters: family, supernatural bird-man-sun	Characters: the land personified--it "ascends," "mountains lie," "cast shadow," "arise"	Characters: the narrator, a red bird, a tree that seemed to "ride"

As H. S. McAllister has pointed out,

> This section is the beginning of the sun-twins story; like the story of the Kiowas, it begins in the mountains. The mountains are a connecting link in the three sections, along with the idea, expressed in various ways, of going into the sky. (The Kiowas came down from the mountains, and the woman and her child fall from the sky.) The personal section is the primary connector here; Momaday continues the list of magic wilderness names (drawing on geography in the history section, on wildflowers, trees, and birds in the personal). He repeats a scene of the legend, with a natural redbird "high in the branches" of a tall tree that "seemed to ride across the blue sky." He chooses the type of tree and type of bird carefully: the lodgepole pine suggests tepees, because it got its name from its use in constructing tepees (lodges), and the male (but not the female) pine grosbeak is a bright pinkish-red bird.

Thus, Momaday the writer pulls together the different subjects with these incremental repetitions of very different elements. The legendary past comes alive in the knowledge of the tribe's known history and then again (and more vividly yet subtly) in the remembered life of the narrator. He himself saw how the illusion of movement which a tall tree gives when silhouetted against a wind blown, perhaps cloud-specked sky could suggest the magical transformation of trees and other creatures such as the grosbeak and humans. The sun, of course, will be returned to again and again throughout the book both as a natural object and a divine being.

Writing Assignments (continued)

3. Choose any other section of the book and similarly chart the three-part organization. Then write a commentary on the relationship within the section of the three parts. Finally, write a commentary on the relationship of the section as a whole to other parts of the book, whether before or after it. (About 500 words)

4. How successful do you feel Momaday is in giving a different dimension to his tripartite subject matter? What are your feelings about the book? Do you feel stimulated in any way for further reading or writing of your own? (About 150 words)

LESSON FOUR

TRADITIONAL TALES

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Lesson 4: Traditional Tales

Reading Assignment:

The Portable North American Indian Reader

Instructional Notes:

For this lesson, we are relying on the relevant sections of Turner's The Portable North American Indian Reader, a book which contains a not altogether satisfactory but conveniently packaged selection of traditional prose material. Our procedure will resemble that in other lessons--you will write 1,000 to 1,500 words on your choice of questions. We are providing commentary on most of the material in the relevant sections of the Turner anthology, arranged in what we have judged to be the order of difficulty. It will be up to you to pick what suits your taste or what you can understand or identify with the best. You are expected to read a total of 150 pages out of the roughly 300 pages cited in this lesson and answer a sufficient number of discussion questions relating to that material.

First, we suggest that you read Turner's introduction. He does an excellent job of portraying the lack of real communication between Indians and non-Indians since their first contacts with each other. He also tries to break down what he calls the "new stereotype" of the Indian, a new romantic version of the Noble Savage. But in doing so, Turner fails to make the vital distinction between what the tribal cultures have taught (and are still teaching) and what tribal people have done despite the teachings.

The reader of his book will be looking at the teachings of Indian culture more than the facts of Indian life, past and present. If the reader can keep this point in mind, Turner's warnings against forming an overly favorable Indian stereotype are probably not necessary. And if you, as a student, are living in North Dakota or elsewhere on the Northern Plains as you take this course, then the best possible way to avoid forming stereotypes is to get to know Indian people personally, which is usually not that difficult in this area. Another thought about Turner's introduction is that obviously, Indian people, past and present, have not been perfect, and we would not want to create a new stereotype of a perfect Indian. Perhaps, in Massachusetts in 1975, Turner could see such a stereotype being formed. But from the middle of the Northern Plains in 1981, the negative Indian stereotype seems far stronger and far more destructive of honest, objective mutual understanding between Indian and non-Indian. Our general judgment is that it will do no harm to give some attention to the good aspects of American Indian life and culture, any more than it would do harm to pay some attention to the "good intentions" which Turner ascribes to the United States, or some attention to the good aspects of Christian teachings irrespective of the excesses of many Christian people.

Lesson 4

Writing Option #1: Discuss Turner's Introduction.

One format might be to analyze how he makes some good points and some bad or highly debatable points.

Turner's short introduction to his first section on myths and tales (p. 21) is also useful, though his attempt to provide some relevant cultural context ends in an evasive referral of his readers to several other very general works on Indian subjects. We feel that Turner has arranged the myths and tales with little attention to their difficulty or accessibility for the average reader. We have tried to re-arrange our commentary to cover what we judge to be the easiest material first. This is the order we will follow:

Winnebago	pp. 106-124
Cherokee	pp. 86-106
Tlingit	pp. 213-224
Blackfeet	pp. 158-174
Sioux	pp. 125-157
Penobscot	pp. 25-29
Micmac	pp. 30-35
Navajo	pp. 175-205
Nez Perce	pp. 225-232
Iroquois	pp. 36-85
Hopi	pp. 206-212

Thus, instead of beginning with the Penobscot material on page 25, we suggest starting with the Winnebago material on page 106. We have provided considerable commentary on this material, and beginning with it should give you a solid introduction to at least some of the essential qualities of these oral traditional materials. Of course, you can read the material in any order you want and skip over any material that you come to dislike for whatever reason.

Winnebago Trickster Cycle, pp. 106-125:

The "Trickster" figure is the most universal character in American Indian literature. For the Winnebago, his Indian name translates into English as Foolish One; for the Sioux, he is Iktomi, the Spider. On the Northwest Coast, he can be Raven; the Omaha Indians have come to translate their Ichtinike as Monkey; several tribes refer to him as Dawn Man or First Light Man; and probably his most universal name of all is Coyote. Winnebago legendry contains one of the best origin stories for trickster: In the medicine lodge ritual, the voice of the West begins the story of how the world was created and the medicine rite established.

> What it was our father, Earthmaker, lay upon as he came to consciousness, we do not know. Tears flowed from his eyes and fell below him. He lay there motionless. He saw nothing. Nothing existed in the world. Now he began to move, his right arm first, then his left, then his right foot and then his left. His eyes were open and he turned on his side and looked below him, far down from where he lay. There, far below him,

> he noticed something bright and shining. Those were his tears and they had formed the waters of the earth. As he lay there stretched out, he kept thinking and thinking, 'unbeknown to me, without my intention, my tears as they fell below, formed bodies of water. Perhaps now, if I really intend something, if I really wish something, it will come into existence just as the waters were formed from my tears, by themselves.[1]

The process continues in the same intensely personal and experimental fashion until Ma ona, Earthmaker, has formed the earth into something like its present state, and filled it with birds, animals, fishes, insects, etc.

> And then, at the very end of his thoughts, he made us, man. We were not even equal in strength to a fly. Indeed we were the very weakest of all things Earthmaker created.
>
> When he was finished Earthmaker looked at all the things he had created and he liked what he had done and lay there, filled with happy thoughts.
>
> Of us he was proud and he gazed, again and again, at the human beings he had created. But alas! not equal in strength to any of the other beings that lived on the earth had he made us and we were on the point of being destroyed by evil ones. So he formed a being, just like ourselves, and when he had finished him, he called him, Trickster, Foolish-One. 'O, Foolish-One,' he said, 'you are going to be sent to the earth. Weak and pitiable in every respect I have created the human beings, for I made them as the last of my thoughts. And now this last creation of mine is being attacked on all sides by evil spirits. Evil spirits are indeed destroying them, the human beings. So do you, Foolish-One, go to earth and put things aright.'
>
> Thus, was Foolish-One sent to the earth, with this purpose. Yet when he came to the earth he did not do what he had been told. He just roamed around and accomplished absolutely nothing. No good did he accomplish. In fact he injured some of the creations of Earthmaker. So Earthmaker made him come back and made him sit near him, to the right of his seat.[2]

A contemporary Winnebago interested in the use of the Trickster stories puts it this way--that as soon as he was put on the earth, Trickster forgot who he was and what he was supposed to do.[3] Then, as we are told in the tales, he "wandered aimlessly along" doing whatever popped into his mind. Thus, he often imitates other creatures, usually with hilarious results. When he becomes aware of his own appetites, he often uses trickery to try to satisfy himself, but since he never follows rules and often over-indulges, his adventures usually end in disaster for himself. He has all sorts of special powers, but he forgets how to use them, or else uses them improperly.

He is usually a negative teaching example--you are not supposed to do what this person does. The cycle of tales also has profound psychological messages, a few of which we will suggest.

Turner begins with episode 11. Radin's synopsis on pages 106-108 will give you some idea of what Turner has left out.

In episode 11, Trickster demonstrates his aimlessness, his egoism, his competitive spirit (he refuses to be "out-pointed" by the "man"), and his comic tendency either to overdo things or not to stick with them at all (after a long time in the "pointing contest," then he begins trying to bribe the man to quit). Perhaps the central theme of the story, though, is Trickster's faulty perception of the situation. He feels that everything in the universe is paying attention to him, or acting for his sake. Sometimes, this trait becomes real neuroticism, but always it is a gentle reminder that in the Indian way of thinking, man is not the ruler of the world; he is only one of its citizens. Granted, man has marvelous powers of rationality, invention, imitation, and manipulation of tools with his strange and unique opposed thumb--but these same powers give him the potential for marvelous varieties of folly too, because he is so far removed from a basic grounding in instinct or, one might say, from the basic "program" of life on this planet earth. Just as egoism can lead human beings to over-estimate their importance in the world community, the same sort of egoism and self-centered individualism can lead the individual human to over-estimate his own importance in his own tribal community, where such self-centered forms of action and perception are more laughable than laudable. These ideas are just some of those that the deceptively "simple" trickster tales can be used to teach or demonstrate.

Writing Option #2

Discuss how an excessive self-awareness can lead a person to mis-interpret the situation he finds himself in.

Episode 12

This episode is probably the most wide-spread and widely told Trickster tale in existence. Indian people tell it throughout the plains and woodlands and it will often be known in slightly different forms in the Pacific Northwest, Southwest, Canada, and elsewhere. It is one of the truly inter-tribal tales, and one can see why when one looks at the "political" message of the tale. The core of the tale is Trickster's success in deceiving the ducks (sometimes turkeys in other versions), getting all to close their eyes and dance while he wipes them out. Sometimes it is suggested that the White man, and crooked Indians as well, have played the trickster in this way while Indians have played the ducks. There is always at least one duck, though, whether in the story or in life, that opens its eyes to check on what the trickster is doing--and this duck saves the rest of the people. The story, then, can be used to make several types of political points and lessons. For example, the Red-Eyed Duck breaks the rules or "laws" by opening his eyes, but we must realize that Trickster is the one who made up that "law" expressly for the purpose of

taking advantage of ducks. Sometimes religious leaders too, have told their followers to "close their eyes and dance." And so on and so on.

At the end of this episode, Trickster prepares to enjoy the fruits of his "labors" by cooking the ducks. But his laziness and his creativeness combine to get the best of him. This instance is one in which he is so tricky that he fools himself. Addressing his anus as if it were a person, he tells it to guard the food while he sleeps.

Writing Option #3: Discuss the universality of the "political" message of this tale.

Episodes 13 and 14

Several types of serious psychological points can be made concerning Trickster's action of addressing a part of himself as a separate person. It is a splitting of the personality, a neurotic mechanism which can lead people to harm themselves, as Trickster certainly does when he decides to punish his anus by burning its mouth in episode 14.

In many such episodes as this, we have to deal with the gross nature of the subject material, too. A good storyteller telling these tales in a traditional setting will get a lot more laughs than the casual reader can possibly realize, especially if the tale is told in an Indian language, which allows many subtle nuances, absurdities and ironies to be brought out, especially for those who are already familiar with the tale. But in no way are these tales akin to the "dirty joke" in "standard" American culture. There is always a serious point involved which should be contemplated; the hilarious laughter functions as an aid to contemplation, not an impediment. The Sacred and the Profane, the serious and the humorous, belong together in Indian culture if not in modern European-American culture, and such cultural differences in world-view make it difficult for some European-Americans to grasp the complete and proper setting and use of these tales. Incidentally, the White inability to appreciate these tales in the past has contributed greatly to the decline in their use by Indian people whose children, for the most part, still attend schools where the teacher would condemn them for telling such a tale and probably expel them for telling some of the other explicitly sexual tales in the cycle. There is a great irony involved in the decline of the trickster stories, especially in combination with the demand for more teaching of morality and sex education in the schools.

Toward the end of episode 14, we find Trickster eating pieces of his own intestines. (And, implicitly, some of his own excrement along with them.) "My, what unspeakable perversions!" the pious Christian might say. But once again, the tale conveys serious points, as well as humor, in its original cultural setting. Trickster, it is said, has had his intestines wrapped all around the outside of his body up to now, providing a graphic symbol of one who thinks far too much about satisfying his guts, his hunger.

Now, through his over-zealous punishment of his offending part, he has helped to create the proper relationship of intestines or guts to the rest of the body so that today, it is said, human beings are structured as they are because of Trickster, and should no longer act as if their guts are all-important, even though we still have some latent tendencies in that direction, deriving from the days before Trickster "fixed" this problem.

Writing Option #4: Discuss some of the implications and ramifications of a person treating part of his/her body as if it had a separate existence. (Remember, our very language encourages this attitude, allowing us to say that "my leg hurts," or "my head aches," etc., as if these parts were pieces of property instead of belonging to a holistic, unified being, ourselves.)

Or: Discuss your ideas about the "morality" of these episodes which deal so explicitly with bodily functions.

Episode 15

Here, the sexual urge intrudes itself upon Trickster's disorderly and rather bland consciousness, and he immediately begins to think far too much about his penis, too, at least until it is "cut down to size" in episode 38 by a chipmunk who chews it off when Trickster tries to club him to death with it. After that, it is said, the penis attained its present size and status. (Turner has omitted Episode 38.) But in this "earlier" episode, Trickster still does not know how to deal with his sexual urges, and apparently they seem huge to him. His penis is "like a flagpole" in the morning, and he has to "handle" it until it softens! This episode is very much like a gently satirical portrait of the teenaged boy reaching puberty and tormentedly trying to figure out what to do with this sexual awakening that has suddenly come upon him. The issue is always very important for such a boy, and this episode graphically illustrates the possible over-importance by presenting Trickster's penis as being literally yards long, a fantastically prominent thing which is so long it must be coiled up in a box he carries on his back. In the telling, this tale was probably used as a light-hearted form of sex education in which the young boys could laugh at themselves and at each other for being so much like Trickster and for not being able to deal properly with such a natural function. As is often done with these tales, a single mention of "the time Trickster thought the chiefs were flying the flags" would be enough to good-humoredly chastise a boy who was showing signs of emphasizing his sexual prowess too much.

Writing Option #5: Discuss your reaction to the possibility of using Trickster tales for sex education in today's society and in today's school systems. Or: Discuss the timeless and universal problems of sex that show up in these tales, especially as they apply to sexual maturation during puberty and the ways that a society helps or fails to help its young people get through this crisis stage of their lives.

Lesson 4

Episode 16

This episode describes what might well be Trickster's first attempt to have intercourse with a female. His procedure is a little strange, but this, too, has its meaning. Like a shy teenager, he tries to do his courting from a distance--in fact, clear across the lake! His choice of the chief's daughter may be satirical in that she is probably a respectable girl looking for a good man with a good reputation and some means of livelihood. But everyone knows Trickster is disreputable, crooked, and very capable of marrying just for status, or pleasure, or other lesser motives. So everything about the situation is inappropriate, and bawdily absurd, as are the attempts to stop the process of intercourse. Finally, the comedy is consummated when the old lady is "thrown a great distance" and Trickster laughs, calling her an "old naughty woman."

Writing Option #6: Discuss the possible use of the tale to show what happens to those who engage in illicit intercourse as Trickster does here. Discuss the comic elements of Trickster tying different weights of rock on his penis to get it to behave properly.

Episode 17:

This tale demonstrates the other side of the "trickery" theme; here, the turkey-buzzard fools Trickster. (Sometimes a later tale, similar to #34 in this Winnebago cycle, shows Trickster getting even, but at great pain to his own body.)

In this version, Trickster does nothing specific to provoke the turkey-buzzard's action, so the tale functions mainly to set up the next one in which Trickster fools some women into getting him out of the tree. But Turner has omitted the next tale. Since this tale or ones similar to it can be told with more emphasis on Trickster's bothering and pestering the bird until the bird lets him ride on his back if Trickster will promise to obey all rules and commands, it is reasonable either to read these elements into the existing framework of the tale, or to assume that the narrator has omitted these elements for reasons unknown to us. At any rate, the tale can be used to show that a trickster's foolish and manipulative behavior will come back to him, causing him constant trouble later on. As you might guess, this idea is also a very normal "principle of ethics" among Indian people. (Turner skips from Episode 17 to 20.)

Writing Option #7: Discuss the "poetic justice" of a Trickster being tricked by other creatures, especially one of his victims.

Lesson 4

Episodes 20-21

Here, Trickster experiments with sexual perversion, becoming a woman by tying an elk's liver onto himself and marrying the chief's son. The normal Winnebago courtship conventions are violated here not only by Trickster, but by the old lady and the chief as well. The main theme is Trickster's imposture, and the episode belongs with number 21, which ends with a very bawdy but hilarious event when Trickster's rotten equipment falls off, exposing his imposture. The events of the story are quite absurd, of course. If there is a serious message or teaching function, it probably deals with the impossibility of really physically changing sex, even for those males who might want to take on a woman's role in terms of jobs and social position.

Episode 21 gives us a humorous impression of what Trickster's youngest son from this transsexual union would be like. Naturally, he too is foolish.

Writing Option #8: Discuss what relevancy this tale about having a sex change could have to modern society.

Episode 22

Trickster sometimes "remembers who he is" and acts quite responsibly for a period of time. Here, he raises his son by the woman he is "really" married to just as any good father would, but when the boy is grown, he again reverts to his wandering, aimless life. If this experience parallels human experience, perhaps this episode reflects the real freedom available to older people in Winnebago culture of the time. His conduct toward his son shows that the Winnebago Trickster is not an evil or malicious being; like human beings, he can do some remarkable things despite his characteristic faults. He is a dangerous but sometimes lovable character with great powers, including that wonderful gift of creating laughter out of nothing more or less than life itself.

Writing Option #9: If it is true that the supernatural beings of a culture provide implicit role models and/or means of analyzing and judging human behavior for members of the culture, what differences would you expect to see between a culture that has a living "Trickster" tradition versus one which has God, and the Devil, but no supernatural creature who is both good and evil?

Lesson 4

Episodes 23-24

The bulb or berry "tells" Trickster it is a laxative bulb; when Trickster refuses to believe the bulb, a grossly comical situation ensues. The contemplative side of the tale involves the cultural question of what sorts of "voices" are we humans to listen to in this world, and which voices have the most authority. Here, it is only a little plant, yet Trickster finds that he cannot ignore, contradict or overrule its "statements" or its authority. European-American culture often encourages going forth to "subdue the earth" while Indian culture typically urges much greater attention to, and a greater respect for, all the non-human inhabitants of the earth.

Further insights might be gained by considering what faculties Trickster, and by extension the typical human being, uses to "listen" to the laxative bulb. Since no one seriously claims bulbs can "speak" in the literal sense, a communication from such a plant would have to be picked up by the subconcious or unconscious mind, or by powers of the mind which are described as "mystic" by our European-American culture. Trickster then proceeds to overrule this message by a very conscious exercise of "will." "I know very well that if I chew it, I will not defecate," he says.

Again, it is characteristic of traditional Indian culture to listen to and respect the voices of dream, vision, and mystic knowledge much more than today's dominant non-Indian culture. For the Winnebago still immersed in the traditional culture, it is comically absurd for Trickster not to listen to the authority of the little bulb, and it is hilarious, yet typically human, for him to attempt to exert his own willpower over the bulb. Needless to say, he discovers the truthfulness and real authority of the speaking bulb.

Writing Option #10: Discuss how Trickster's behavior is or is not typical of human beings, in your opinion.

Episodes 25-26

Here, the trees "speak" to Trickster and help to guide him to the water where he washes the dung off himself and tries to get the plums he sees in the water. In this nearly universal episode, the serious side tells us that Trickster's perception, and implicitly human perception, is often faulty. We cannot always discern which is the reality and which is merely a reflection. A similar theme is present in a great many other Trickster episodes, as well as a great variety of world folklore.

Writing Option #11: Discuss the "universal" aspects of the Trickster tales, comparing them where you can to other tales such as Aesop's Fables, fairy tales, your own family tales, or parables from the Bible.

Lesson 4

Episodes 46-49

Turner omits the next 19 episodes and goes to #46, which presents Trickster living in a village and getting even with the Coyote by appealing to Coyote's greed and love of carrion. Coyote goes away humiliated, and Trickster stays in the village until his children there are all grown up. Then he begins to wander again and remembers "the purpose for which he had been sent to earth by Earthmaker." He removes the obstacles along the Mississippi River and destroys all the beings that were molesting the people. In episode 48, he tells a waterfall to move, but it refuses, so he pushes it onto land. Then he sat on a rock and ate a meal, leaving clear imprints in the rock! Thus, Trickster finishes his adventures in the Winnebago cycle of tales.

Writing Option #12: Discuss the "good" side of Trickster, and any other related issues you are interested in.

Cherokee, pp. 86-106

These stories include some simplistic or fragmentary versions, but they are understandable. The creation story shows the experimental, "evolutionary" process that is typical of many Indian creation stories. The story on the origin of fire shows how a group of widely different creatures all cooperate in trying to get the fire, and how finally a very unlikely creature, the Water Spider, succeeds in bringing it back, not because she is big or strong, but because she has her own unique and highly specialized powers, as does each and every creature on earth, according to tribal teachings. The story on the origin of disease and medicine shows how the ecological balance between humans, plants and animals can be maintained if all these creatures have respect for one another and avoid excessive dominance of other beings. There are two stories involving the rabbit as Trickster which might remind you of Br'er Rabbit in the Uncle Remus tales. Then, the Gambler tale tells of a young boy (later in the story, we are told he is Lightning) who goes to seek his father who is Thunder, but keeps encountering the Gambler who is called Brass. The boy survives a number of tests, and a balance between all these supernatural powers is re-established.

The Stone Man story is about defeating a monster who "eats" human beings. Such monsters often are symbolic of things that can obsess humans. Two forces are used to defeat this monster. The seven menstruating women could be read as a corrective to an obsession with sex. Contemplating menstruation could lead one to the biological function of sex, which is procreation and could keep one from becoming obsessed with the other aspect of pleasure. The other force is the central fire of the people, which might mean that the public festivals of the people are helpful also in counter-acting an obsession with sex. There is also a suggestion here that community life with all its mutual support systems is healthier than the solitary existence of this cannibal monster.

Lesson 4

The last story demonstrates how humans can make contact with the spirits of animals (not with individual animals but rather with a more abstract spirit of, for example, "Bear-ness") even though this process is very difficult and dangerous.

Writing Option #13: Discuss any of these stories, analyzing the balances and relationships between all the creatures and forces of the world as portrayed by these stories.

Tlingit, pp. 213-244

The first story deals with contact between a young boy and the wolf-spirits who want to help the starving humans, but the boy's brother-in-law insults the wolf who has come to help. The boy then goes to the "village" of the wolf-spirit in the other world and receives a gift of healing from the wolf-spirit.

The next story deals with contact between humans and frogs. A young woman marries a frog and goes to live with the frog people. If you find that such subjects are too much for you to take seriously, then you might try thinking like this: From one point of view, these stories are an elaborate and entertaining way to point out that frogs (as well as bear, deer, elk, fish, and all our other "neighbors" in the natural world) are our relatives, too, and should be respected as life forms which have a right to exist just as humans do.

The story about Little Felon shows our human kinship to a tiny fish that swims close to the beach and to the snipe who lives along the beaches. Such stories help to create a "magical" world and to improve the quality of life for those who share the oral tradition. The last Tlingit story explains some of the people's relationships to the cedars.

Writing Option #14: Discuss your own reaction to the way these stories define our human interrelationships with the natural world and natural creatures around us.

Blackfeet, pp. 158-174

"Old Man" is the Trickster figure for the Blackfeet. But Old Man is also very explicitly the Creator of many features of our world. He follows a very experimental pattern of creation; often the creatures are made first and then fitted into the world wherever they seem to be able to operate best. Old Man is not perfect, and neither are his creations; but he does have a basic sense of justice, and he does provide mankind with the tools and the ideas to live properly in this world, according to the Indian view. Take special notice of his advice about "dreaming" (see the middle of p. 162); this advice will also help you understand many of the other traditional tales. An important point here is that regardless of whether or not one personally can accept the system of animal-aided dreaming described here, one can accept it as an integral part of the traditional Indian experience and philosophy.

These beliefs are not followed by all Indian people today, but they are still strong in traditional Indian culture.

"The Theft from the Sun" presents an aspect of Old Man/Trickster that one should recognize after becoming acquainted with the Winnebago material.

The "Scarface" story is built around a trip to the Sacred World where the Sun gives Scarface power and knowledge and he returns with his woman to teach his people the correct way to conduct their religious services. The information Scarface brings back would be called divine revelation in Christian terminology. In the Blackfeet traditional way, the Sun is said to be the "chief" of all things, and could be compared to the Christian God, though he is certainly not the same.

Writing Option #15: Discuss the way that balance is achieved at the end of many of these stories. Or discuss the controlling forces of the Universe as portrayed in these tales.

Sioux, pp. 125-157

"The Younger Brother" is a story about overcoming sexual obsessions, sexual jealousy, and blackmail. Notice that the story begins with a bad relationship between the young man and his sister-in-law; then as the young man goes on his way, he defeats a series of allegorical monsters which represent various forms of sexual problems or difficulties in male/female relationships.

Writing Option #16: Discuss the use of "Monsters" in these stories to represent human problems.

You should have already read the selection from Black Elk Speaks, and it is not necessary to read all of the Winter Count (pp. 135-157) unless it really interests you a great deal; read a little and skip over the rest.

Writing Option #17: Discuss whatever you find interesting about the Winter Count.

Penobscot, pp. 25-29

Perhaps now you will be able to see the main ideas of "The Origin of Corn and Tobacco" more clearly. It is a highly allegorical story, and neither the "marriage" to the strange woman, nor her snake lover, nor her directions to "kill and drag her" should be taken literally. Notice

that the end result of the story is a portrayal of man's intimate and magic relationship to the corn and tobacco. These special plants come to us from the sacred world, according to Penobscot tradition, and both the "marriage" and "lover" spoken of have more to do with man's relationship to the sacred world than to this world.

Writing Option #18: Discuss whether you have any trouble relating to some of the motifs or allegorical events in these tales such as the killing of the woman and the instructions to drag her body seven times through the field until all the flesh comes off. (Again--please do not take these events literally.)

The "Turn Over" story also deals with man's relationship to the sacred world. The captured girl gives birth to a "special" child, an "incarnation" of spiritual forces related to certain roots, one might say. The mother escapes, and the son begins to use his powers, first for revenge but then in a more balanced way as part of the yearly cycle of plant life. Notice that the root started it all, and in the case of certain plants, the root restarts the plant each year. These botanical lessons are part of what the story was probably used to teach. Perhaps the "turn over" aspect refers to plants that get their start under logs or rotten wood--or perhaps it merely refers to the way that the plant cycle "turns over" each year.

Writing Option #19: Discuss the way that many of these stories refer to the "real" world in very practical ways, even though they are quite allegorical or symbolic.

Micmac, pp. 30-35

This story begins in the "other" world or in a world prior to this one. Notice that all the first set of characters are "giant man eaters," which can be interpreted as any of the many forces which "bother" or "eat away at" humans (such as criminal tendencies, neuroticism, vices, wars, etc.). In opposition to these forces we have a version of "the twins," familiar figures in much Indian mythology, who sometimes refer to the "twin" relationship between nature and human culture. They also refer to human power to act upon the world. "Taken-from-Guts" grows up at the spring or outside of the camp circle; he is a product of "nature" and must be tamed in order to serve human culture (which ultimately comes from "nature" too). He is careless and dangerous, but he also defeats monsters, survives all tests, and helps to act on the world to make it more like what it is today for its human inhabitants. These are very symbolic stories, but they are also meant to be fun for an audience that understands them.

Writing Option #20: Discuss the heroic qualities of "Taken-from-Guts." Does he also have qualities that don't fit into your concept of heroism?

Lesson 4

Navajo, pp. 175-205

This is a good version of some beautiful material, but it is densely complicated for the solitary unaided reader. You should at least try sampling this material, however. One of the ways that non-Navajos can "get into" this material is to think of this creation as paralleling the essential forces of evolution; it is, of course, an evolutionary creation guided very closely by the spiritual or sacred world. Another way is to think of the four or five worlds as "levels" of consciousness within the human mind; Navajo healing ceremonies often work on this principle by taking a person back down through each of these worlds, straightening out or rebalancing human relationships to the forces of the universe as they appear in each world.

Writing Option #21: Discuss elements from the Navajo material that you can recognize as similar to other stories we have covered.

Nez Perce, pp. 225-232

This section is quite readable and accessible, but it does not introduce important new material. Look it over, and discuss any of it that you wish. Notice the portrayal of intensely different ideas about land ownership and land use in the General Howard recollection on page 232. It is a good example of one small aspect of the cross-cultural conflicts which have made communications difficult for centuries.

Iroquois, pp. 36-85

These are important materials, but they are very complicated and could be better told or translated in a way that relates well to contemporary readers. You could try sampling them, perhaps.

Writing Option #22: If you are interested in this section, there are many possible questions centering around the balance between opposing forces in the natural world which, in the Iroquois view, depends heavily on the corresponding powers in the sacred or hidden world, such as the way in which the thunders control the cycles of evaporation and precipitation in order to balance the relationship between air, water, and earth to produce fertility. Many of these stories personifying thunder and other forces are quite accurate portrayals of natural science as we know it today.

Hopi, pp. 206-212

This material is too completely lacking in ceremonial context. We do not recommend it by itself for the unaided reader.

Section II

Section II of the Turner anthology also contains some good relevant material. Read the Editor's Note as well as poetry and oratory. Since the next lesson emphasizes poetry you may want to skip this section or focus on the oratory in it.

Writing Option #23: Explain your reactions to the apparent simplicity of this poetry. Next, read the oratory and discuss the similarities you see between these speeches and any of the other literature we have read, either in form or in content or both.

Section III

Section III of the Turner anthology is divided into three parts. "Explorations" and "Captivity Narratives" both provide some early White views of Indians. Some praised the Indian, and others like Mary Rowlandson took the typical Puritan attitude that the Indian is a devil placed on earth to torment God's chosen people.

Writing Option #24: After you have read some of these selections comment upon whatever you find surprising or interesting about them.

The third part of this section, titled "Acculturation," gives excerpts from two different "as told to" autobiographies of Winnebago Indian people. Turner's introduction to this section is a little shrill in its insistence on the subjugation of Indian women, and the fact that he has to override a lot of evidence in order to make his overall judgment brings to mind this statement by Bea Medicine, a prominent Indian woman who feels she is a part of a long tradition of female leadership:

> In anthropological literature, Native women have been referred to as drudges, beasts of burden, and other demoralizing terms. Native men have also not been reluctant to characterize Indian women in this manner. They are fond of pointing out that Indian women walked ten paces behind them. To this statement, I have replied, "Of course, we walked ten paces behind you. That's documented. And the reason that we did was to tell you where to go."[4]

There are always at least two sides to an issue, especially in cross-cultural matters. We should try to exercise caution in our judgments and we should try to develop multiple perspectives on all these matters. Indeed, this is exactly what the old tribal traditions exhort us to do.

Lesson 4

The Autobiography of a Winnebago Indian is the story of Sam Blowsnake, a convert to the peyote religion some years before he told his life story to Paul Radin, who published it in 1920. Because he is a peyote convert, he is somewhat negative about his early life and also about the traditional Winnebago religion, which centered around the Medicine Ritual. Blowsnake feels that he has lied about some of the blessings he was supposed to have received from the animal spirits during his fasts, but despite this, the reader gets a pretty clear picture of how intimately and elaborately the traditional Winnebago considered himself related to and helped by the spirit world. The reader also learns a lot about the day-to-day events of growing up as an Indian at this time. It is an amazing story, and Radin's footnotes add a lot of insight into the cross-cultural complexity of Blowsnake's changing life. The selection from Mountain Wolf Woman provides similar insights about a woman's life during roughly the same period. Some very similar points are made, as well as a few that are different. We advise you to read as much of this material as you find interesting.

Writing Option #25: Discuss some of the most important influences on the lives of either or both of these Winnebago Indians, and comment on the extent to which you can or cannot identify with either or both.

Section IV

Section IV of the Turner anthology also contains several selections which can be of use to the student seeking to understand traditional Indian literatures. The Luther Standing Bear selection from Land of the Spotted Eagle speaks eloquently of the strengths of the traditional tribal ways, such as a strong sense of identity, community, artistry, and relationship to everything in the universe, including the spiritual world. Many of these same elements are emphasized in the traditional stories as well, so you would do well to look at this selection.

Writing Option #26: Comment on the points Luther Standing Bear is trying to get across, and whether or not you can agree with him.

Another useful selection is the Hyemeyohsts Storm selection from Seven Arrows. Storm is building contemporary literature very directly and solidly on a base of traditional tales. In this selection, he is explaining some of the allegorical and symbolical meanings of the traditional tales and teachings, as he sees them.

In the early 1970's, there was some confusion over whether Storm was trying to portray Cheyenne religious traditions, or just presenting personal religious statements; consequently, he became a controversial author during the early and middle seventies. It seems that neither his publisher nor some of his Indian reading audience fully understood his particular blend of (1) history, (2) Cheyenne traditional stories, (3) other Indian stories, lore, and beliefs, (4) his own original teaching stories in the Indian style, (5) his own interpretive and speculative lore relating to the Sun-Dance religions, (6) his own original fictional elements which are not specifically Indian but are instead more directly related to the modern novel and the modern historical novel, and (7) the art work in the book, which is not part of any tradition but which helps to bridge the inter-cultural gap. From our perspective, Storm is a very worthwhile and thought-provoking author who has done some stimulating cross-cultural exploration. We highly recommend this selection.

Writing Option #27: Discuss the quest for self-fulfillment and self-completion that Storm portrays in his Singing Stone story and in his fictional characters' discussion of the Indian ways.

Two other selections which may be of use to you are the Gary Snyder and the Vine Deloria selections.

Writing Option #28: Discuss how Gary Snyder thinks traditional Indian culture is affecting contemporary society. Or: Discuss how contemporary Indian peoples are striving to attain a goal of political and cultural self-determination, goals that Indian authors such as Vine Deloria presented to the American public many years ago. Or: Make up your own questions on these authors and answer them.

NOTES

[1] Paul Radin, The Road of Life and Death: A Ritual Drama of the American Indians, (New York: Bollingen Series. Pantheon Books, 1945), pp. 17-33.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Conversations 1970 to 1981 with Felix White, Sr., Winnebago Tribal Elder who knows these tales directly from oral tradition.

[4] Bea Medicine, The Native American Woman: A Perspective, (Austin, Texas: National Educational Laboratory, ERIC/CRESS, March 1978), p. 8.

LESSON FIVE

TRADITIONAL POETRY

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Lesson 5: Traditional Poetry

Reading Assignment: In the Trail of the Wind, ed. John Bierhorst

Instructional Notes

Of all the types and periods of Native American literature, perhaps the most challenging and potentially rewarding is that of traditional poetry. While it poses considerable problems for most modern readers, it also offers insights into the heart of the cultures from which the poetry sprung.

What modern cultures usually think of as a decoration to life, almost a luxury to be enjoyed after tending to the essentials of food, clothing, shelter, and similar material needs, American Indians (along with other pre-industrial cultures) thought of poetry as also essential, as food for the all-important spirit that would otherwise starve. Thus, this poetry (a small sample of which you will read) is very unlike the poetry of other cultures in that it was totally intrinsic to a person's or a tribal group's life. It was more in the nature of what prayer is thought of in the life of devout persons.

On the other hand, since it is still poetry in the sense of heightened imaginative expression in words, it is very much like any other kind of poetry, old or new, from whatever culture. The same tools of analysis, understanding, and appreciation that you may have brought to European-American poetry by a Walt Whitman or Emily Dickinson will also help you in understanding and (we hope) enjoying American Indian poetry.

The volume edited by John Bierhorst, In the Trail of the Wind, could have been organized in different ways, but he chose to group the works by subject matter (such as hunting, prayer, and love). Other similar collections have been arranged by geographical area (such as Eastern Woodlands, Great Plains, and Southwest) or tribe (such as Navajo, Sioux, and Chippewa). As you read, try to make other groupings, and if you have particular interests, try to highlight them.

Perhaps the most important value that this poetry has to teach us is that of the sacredness and power of "the word." Humans are the one creature who have the capacity to use a discrete, a refined, and a precise language. Yet we are also, thus, the only creatures who can lie, who can say that which is not. Thrilling, challenging, and possibly monstrous, isn't it, that capacity to manipulate as well as to communicate?

Lesson 5

In this age of electronic media--television, radio, film, phonograph records, and endless hype--the Word that the Bible records as "the beginning" has been denatured. ("In the beginning, was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.") Yet the word--the power of language, of naming, of saying what is as opposed what is not, of articulating and in a sense controlling life--all this verbal art was a central value in native cultures, and this concept of power in language greatly helps us to understand the fragments of "literature" that descend to us through ethnographic records.

How good is your word? How important are words to you? Remember that with the exception of some tribes in middle America like the Aztecs and Mayas, these cultures were pre-literate; there were no books, no alphabets. That world was light years away from the Evening News and the Johnny Carson Show, but it had centrality, cohesion, and direction. Did the "world," life, the universe, understanding, or whatever your fundamental, lowest-common-denominator concept is, begin with language, this magical power? How good is the word? It was, for many people, the very essence of life.

Thus, as with some other poetry like that of the British and American immigrants at the beginning of the 20th century or of Japanese writers of haiku (very brief imagistic poems usually about nature), traditional American Indian poetry is mainly very concise. In any good poetry each word counts heavily, and none is wasted. Each word may conjure up many associations and feelings not usually conveyed in everyday language use. Again, we can compare poetry with the use of words in rites; in both contexts, there is an intensity that the "insider" feels even when the vocabulary may be shared with mundane uses of the word. (For example, the word bread refers to a common food, but in some Christian religions, that word is heavily symbolic and meaningful in the rite of communion and allusions to it.)

While reading the poetry in the Bierhorst anthology, keep in mind one more problem, and it is a major and virtually insurmountable one, the problem of translation. At the time of the white explorers' and settlers' first arrivals in the New World, there were thousands of different native language here. North of Mexico there were probably around three hundred mutually unintelligible or distinct languages, some of which have disappeared with the destroyed peoples and cultures that used them. Just as there have been many different translations of ancient literature such as the epics of Homer and the Bible, so are there different translations of the native poetry that very largely existed only in the oral tradition (as the Homeric poetry originally did) and that was passed on from one generation to another and lived in the tribal memory until at one point an ethnographer or other bilingual auditor made a record of it. Thus we who do not know the original language and who have not heard the oral poetry are at the mercy of the recorder and the translator. How accurate were they?

How literally did the translator translate? Was "poetic license" taken, perhaps to make the poem suit the taste of the English-speaking reader more familiar with Shakespeare and Wordsworth than the anonymous creators of native song? Thus, we must read with a measure of skepticism. We must constantly remind ourselves that we are at least one remove from the original, and to compound the problem, we also have a cultural gap to cross. The values and customs of the ancient Greeks must be learned before we can fully understand and appreciate The Iliad and The Odyssey, and no one would pretend to be an authority on those great poems without knowing the ancient Greek language as well.

We can, then, only make a modest beginning with the traditional native poetry, and yet in spite of the language and cultural barriers, we can begin with excited curiosity and respect to listen to voices out of a past that may yet delight and touch us. Literally listen. Read the songs, omens, complaints, and prayers aloud to yourself or to others, and listen to the words.

Writing Assignments:

1. Note particularly section 3 of Bierhorst's introduction in which he describes eight "aspects of Indian thought." Choose two of those aspects and write an essay of about 500 words in which you explain how they are illustrated in representative entries in the anthology.

2. Choose a particular tribe represented in the anthology, preferably one that lived or lives in your area. (For instance, if you reside in North Dakota, you might choose the Sioux or the Chippewa.) Reread the literature by this tribe, and write an essay of about 500 words in which you try to generalize about the attitudes and values of the tribe as reflected in its literature. Admittedly, the sampling is small, and you may wish to draw on other related materials. You may not be able to reach any definite conclusions, but you can at least speculate. Don't forget to check Bierhorst's notes beginning on p. 176.

3. Choose one of the thirteen sections of In the Trail of the Wind, reread the material in it (aloud again and trying to capture the spirit of the original composer), and write an essay of about 500 words in which you generalize about the subject matter of the section. (For instance, you might choose "Among Flowers That Enclose Us" and then characterize the love poems in it.) Questions to consider: How are the sections similar? How different? What range of feeling and attitude is expressed in them? How would you describe the degree to which they are accessible or understandable to you? Do they express universal themes and feelings, or do they make statements that seem radically different to your experience and understanding? (You are not limited to these questions nor do you have to answer all of them; consider them as guidelines.) Again, don't forget to check Bierhorst's notes for possibly pertinent information.

4. Choose another one of the thirteen sections of In the Trail of the Wind and after rereading it aloud write an essay of about 500 words in which you give your personal reasons for liking or disliking it (or for any combination of personal feelings in response to it). You should try to be reasonable and open-minded, but at the same time if you have strong personal feelings, you are invited to express them. You may also refer to your own similar experiences, but try to relate them to specific selections in the section you choose.

Further reading: Abraham Chapman, ed., Literature of the American Indians: Views and Interpretations

A. Grove Day, The Sky Clears: Poetry of the American Indians

LESSON SIX

MODERN FICTION

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Lesson 6: Modern Fiction

Reading Assignment: James Welch, Winter in the Blood

Instructional Notes

In this lesson and in Lesson 8 on Leslie Silko's novel Ceremony, we turn to contemporary Native American fiction, of which there is a substantial amount of good quality. Other novels and short stories could readily supplement or augment these two novels, which we have chosen partly for their high quality and partly for their being representative of different themes and areas. Certainly, N. Scott Momaday's House Made of Dawn, winner of the Pulitzer Prize in 1969, belongs with the fiction of Welch and Silko as among the best written and the most interesting of contemporary American fiction.

We should not inadvertently deprecate the Native American fiction writers by thinking of them as special cases to be read and thought of as merely "Indian" authors. Welch, Silko, and Momaday, no doubt all proud of being Indian, are perhaps the three best known and most highly acclaimed contemporaries, but there is a host of other Native Americans also writing fiction, perhaps in a higher proportion for their total number than most other American ethnic groups. (I'm not sure it would be worth the time investigating this impression, but it might be an interesting project for the idle hours of some literary sociologist. Any group that is undergoing fundamental changes--such as women in the modern Western world--probably is stimulated and stimulates themselves to a higher than usual degree of artistic productivity.)

What does make this writing special and especially interesting for our purposes is that not only is it extremely well written but also it deals with characteristically Indian themes. Thus, your reading and study should be bifocal: you should perceive the way in which the story is told, and you should see what the story is about, particularly the "Indianness" of it.

Like most modern fiction of any degree of seriousness, Winter in the Blood is written with a poet's heightened sense of language. Not all modern fiction writers are actually also poets, as Welch is, but most of them try to use language as carefully and intensively as a poet. Thus, a rewarding reading is bound to perceive at least some of these subtle devices of language and narrative. The outline in Appendix I is a tool that may help you see the broad range of a writer's resources, and an aficionado of literature, as of bullfighting, gardening, or Bach, will have heightened pleasure and understanding to the degree that the writer's use of these resources is understood. We suggest that you briefly review the outline "What to Say about Fiction" before you read the novel, especially noting section V on Style. As to the last section, Classification of the Novel, consider the elegy as a literary

form that may be especially pertinent to Winter in the Blood. After you read the novel and as you are answering the following questions, you may wish to refer to the outline again.

Originally, an elegy was a poem in a particular form that expressed sorrow or mourning for a dead person. Now it means, more generally, any expression of lamentation for someone or even something that is dead or lost. Even the title of Winter in the Blood suggests that it may also be an elegy. Looked upon as a novel of losses, one can point to specific deaths both in the past and in the present action of the novel. Beyond those literal deaths, one may also read the novel as an elegy for a past (if not completely dead) way of life, that of the Indian before the white man came to America.

Writing Assignments

1. In two well-developed paragraphs, explain how the novel may be, first, read as a literal elegy about the deaths of certain persons and, second, how it may be read as a cultural elegy.

Instructional Notes (Continued)

As suggested by the section on plot in Appendix I (Section II), conflicts may be both obvious and subtle. In the rudimentary Western movie plot, there was no question as to who the heroes and villains were. The plot was usually uncomplicated in the way that real life is, and the viewer automatically gasped when the long line of armed Indians in warbonnets crested the ridge overlooking the settlers' wagon train. Just as unreflectively, the audience cheered when the cavalry came racing to the rescue. Even in more sophisticated movies and fiction, the identification of heroes and villains and, thus, of the conflict that gives rise to the plot may be relatively simple. The hero (or perhaps more accurately the protagonist) struggles against an antagonist towards resolution of the conflict.

But what is the conflict and who or what is the antagonist in Winter in the Blood? Probably the most interesting fictions (and movies and other dramas of all kinds) are those in which the conflict exists on multiple levels: the story may have obvious "good guy vs. bad guy" oppositions; or the conflict may be between the protagonist and his or her envorinment (nature); or it may be between the protagonist and some general or abstract idea or force as represented by an impersonal "society"; or it may be a struggle between different or opposing elements of thought and feeling within the protagonist, he or she being a self divided against itself.

Thus, on the first level, we see the unnamed protagonist of Winter in the Blood in opposition to his mother and the Cree girlfriend who has fled with his electric razor and rifle. On the second level, early on we learn of the hostility of the environment: "the burnt prairie beneath a blazing sun" (Ch. 1) and "'It never rains anymore . . . . It never rains around here when you need it'" (Ch. 2).

Writing Assignments (Continued)

2. Do you see any conflict of the third sort in which the nameless protagonist, the narrator of the story, is in opposition to some social pressures?

   If so, what are those social ideas or forces? If not, how does the hero escape such opposition? What is the "society" of the novel like? Do you see any groupings among the total number of characters, and is there a hierarchy among them? (About 250 words)

3. Here is an over-simplified, perhaps even a stereotyped list of contrasts between Indian and non-Indian (or European-American) characteristics. It is not intended as anything more than a guide to discussion as a listing of extremes.

INDIAN STEREOTYPES	vs.	EUROPEAN-AMERICAN STEREOTYPES
KINSHIP: Family, clan, tribe, nation. Kinship is identified with the slightest family tie.		INDIVIDUAL FAMILY: Husband, wife and children; valuing few ties beyond the immediate family.
SHARING: Things are kins', not own. Honor in giving and sharing with another.		ACQUIRING: Possession conscious. Honor in possessing things, holding for self.
COOPERATIVE: Emphasis on working together, helping and sharing with another.		COMPETITIVE: Emphasis on outdoing your fellow man; rivalry to prove who is best.
CONSUMING: Dependent upon natural sources, producing only what is needed. Living off the land and using what is available.		PRODUCING: Promoting agricultural and industrial productivity beyond what is needed in order to acquire other things and have reserves for the future.
NECESSITY: Living by demand only, doing what needs to be done now only, living for the present.		TIME CONSCIOUS: Living as a slave to the clock, emphasizing schedule, priorities and promptness.

Lesson 6

3. Continued

INDIAN STEREOTYPES	vs.	EUROPEAN-AMERICAN STEREOTYPES
PATIENT: "Idleness" is enjoyed and appreciated, with easy-going life under little pressure to do more than is necessary.		URGENT: "Idleness" is abhorred, hurry is the by-word. Must always be busy getting things done.
PRESENT ORIENTED: The present is all important. Live now!		FUTURE ORIENTED: Preparations and planning for the future is all important. Live for what might be.
QUIET: Another's presence may be enjoyed or appreciated without talking; silence is not embarrassing; no need to talk if you have nothing to say.		VOCAL: Always talking, embarrassed by silence when others are around; must make conversation even if it is trite.
PASSIVE: "The dreamer" allows others to dominate and takes sidelines if others want to take the lead.		AGGRESSIVE: "The doer" likes to take the lead, needs to be noticed, often pushy.

To what extent does the novel reflect the degree of accuracy or inaccuracy of the oppositions?

As a starter, consider the possessiveness that the protagonist shows about the gun and electric razor. Is his concern about them indicative of a reversal of the second pair, "Sharing" and "Acquiring"?

Write about this contrast and three others in the list. Refer to at least one episode that illustrates each contrasting pair. Show how the novel counters or dispels the stereotypes, and suggest how the novel as a whole might be read as a commentary on the dilemma of the modern Indian living in a world of values very different from those of the traditional Indian past. Illustrate with reference to both Indian and non-Indian characters. (About 350 words)

4. What indication is there that the conflict in the novel is internal, in which the anonymous protagonist has ambivalent thoughts and feelings? What does he seek and desire? At what points in the novel does he come to some self understanding? Of what does this understanding consist? Is this conflict transcendent in the sense that the commentary speaks to all possible readers and their internal conflicts? Or is it limited to a special time and place, to special people with peculiar problems? (About 350 words)

5. Choose a relatively short chapter and write a stylistic analysis of it. (Refer to the outline of Appendix I, Section V.) First of all identify the questions in Section V that seem most pertinent to Winter in the Blood. Then limit yourself to no more than three lettered divisions. For instance, one might write about the dialog and humor of Chapter 11. One might write about the use of description to underline or clarify meaning in Chapter 13. (Isn't there significance in the blurring of the vision of the narrator? How is mud referred to here in foreshadowing of mud later on? What is ironic about the high quality of Emily Short's fields? How does Welch easily and subtly contrast the values of the narrator and Lame Bull as he tells of their trip to town?) (About 400 words)

6. Carefully consider the last two chapters (pp. 41-42) and the Epilogue. How does the action in Chapter 41 prepare us for the Epilogue? What is the justification or purpose of Chapter 42?

   What are your feelings about the novel as they are focused on the last pages? What does Welch want to leave you with? (About 500 words)

LESSON SEVEN

MODERN POETRY

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Lesson 7: Modern Poetry

Reading Assignment: Carriers of the Dream Wheel: Contemporary Native American Poetry, edited by Duane Niatum

Instructional Notes

Browse through the whole book first of all, getting a general idea of what each author's poetry is like in terms of both styles and subjects. Then reread until you feel yourself ready to write responses to the topics below. As with the traditional poetry of Lesson 5, read at least some of the poetry aloud, either to yourself or to someone else. If, like many readers, you do not often read poetry or find it difficult to understand, you might try a bit of self deception by pretending it is merely prose written in an irregular typography or that it is merely popular song lyrics without the music or--which is closer to the truth of the essence of poetry--that it is condensed prose that you can reconstitute by adding a reader's (yours) ingredients of thought and feeling to make a banquet of words. (If you feel you need some review of the elements of poetry, check some good introductory text such as Brooks and Warren, Understanding Poetry, X. J. Kennedy, Introduction to Poetry, or Perrine, Sound and Sense.)

When James Welch (Blackfeet and Gros Ventre) came to the University of North Dakota for a reading of his poetry several years ago, he interspersed the readings of his poems with comments about them, such as how they had been inspired or the backgrounds to them. At one point in explanation of a poem with an Indian reservation setting, he said that he didn't want to be thought of as an Indian poet; he wanted to be thought of simply as a poet.

We don't know if all sixteen of the poets in this anthology would have similar reactions, but chances are many of them would. Yet they have consented to be identified in the anthology (subtitled Contemporary Native American Poetry), in other such anthologies, in Native American periodicals, and in such settings like writers' conferences as American Indian poets. The apparent contradiction affords an interesting point of departure to the study of both contemporary prose and poetry.

Identifying anything by membership in its group or class is an inevitable human activity. The natural sciences, for instance, are based on taxonomy or classification. Plants, animals, and minerals are grouped according to certain shared similarities, but the classifying that can lead to understanding and further study may also ignore certain other perspectives that may be of overriding importance. The hungry botanist would not say, "Mushrooms are good on steak" if the mushrooms were poisonous (as some are). The point applied to people (and to one subclass

of them, poets) is especially important. What is the purpose and point of subdividing people racially? Or of an anthology of Native American poetry? Why might James Welch want to be known as simply a poet yet consent to be included in Niatum's anthology?

As with the mushrooms or any other classifiable subject, the function varies, and we must recognize not only a literary but also a political or social purpose in this kind of classification. Of course, one may be proud to be an exception to one's "class"--the first son to graduate from college, the first woman surgeon in the state, or (like Scott Momaday) the first Indian to be a Pulitzer Prize-winning author. But one doesn't want to get degrees or awards because one is handicapped or limited in any way. Columbus' explorations were not derogated as "not bad for an Italian," yet we know how common ethnic, racial, and sexist slurs are in our pluralistic society that has sometimes fallen short of its democratic ideals. Not only a poet like James Welch but each of us lives on various levels, in various "classes," in various ways. That is not to say that our lives are disunified. On the contrary, these levels might be seen as the layers of a cake or the sections of an orange each part of which is complemented or fulfilled by the other parts which combine into a (possibly) lovely and meaningful whole. "Take me for what I am."

Here we are back at one of the basic problems of literature as well as the reason for this course. Literature has always had a two-fold burden of sweetness and light, beauty and usefulness; it could and would both please and instruct. Within the context of this course, the beauty or enjoyment would be self-evident; the usefulness, the socio-political aspect, would vary greatly but would likely have a certain orientation to the often traumatic, usually disruptive, sometimes captious, sometimes comic goings-on between cultures--the Red and the White. We learn and grow by going outside our narrow egos, our-selves, whether racially, sexually, or ethnically.

There is a certain arrogance, then, in anyone's expecting an artist from another culture (or subculture) to provide an open sesame to a new world solely for the benefit of the uninformed. In the United States there is often a terrific (terrifying?) degree of disunity under the appearance of Union. What did the readers of The New York Times comprehend of the 1973 confrontation of the dissident American Indians and the U.S. Government at Wounded Knee, South Dakota? What was the response of people in Boston or Atlanta as the United States celebrated its centennial when word was received of Custer's defeat at the Little Big Horn in the summer of 1876? We mean to suggest by questions such as these that our culture is far from being simple and well unified but is instead plural, diversified, and complex. And one part of it that is generally not well understood is Native American Culture.

Yet at the same time there are many shared values existing now and in the remote past between Native and European-American cultures, and the longer the two originally very different cultures exist side-by-side, the more they are likely to be overlapping. We should expect, then, to find both shared values (such as a belief in the dignity and even holiness of the individual) and divergent means to their realization (such as the rite of the sweat lodge for spiritual as well as physical purification).

Writing Assignments

1. Choose a poet who seems to be writing in ways that are traditional and in subjects that are identical or similar to traditional poetry as studied in Lesson 5. Write two well-developed paragraphs on these similarities. Cite particular lines or poems from the chosen author and the traditional poetry to support your observations.

2. Write briefly (about 300 words) about a poet in the anthology who seems not to have any obvious "Indian" subjects or stylistic features in his or her poems. In what sense is the author "Indian"?

3. Choose a poem by any author that you found unnecessarily opaque or uninteresting, and explain your reaction to it. (About 300 words)

4. Choose a poem you especially liked (or didn't like!), and write an analysis of it, including your paraphrase of it and your commentary on its interesting stylistic features. (About 500 words)

5. Choose any one poet (other than the one you wrote of for the first response) whom you liked, and write an essay on that poet's work.

   You might want to discuss the "Indianness" or "non-Indianness" of the author; the ideas and feelings recurrent in the poetry; comparisons and contrasts with other authors in this anthology or in other works read.

   Feel free, also, to include your own subjective remarks that explain your preferences or selections in terms of your own experiences. (About 1000 words)

LESSON EIGHT

MODERN FICTION

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Lesson 8: Modern Fiction

Reading Assignment: Leslie Silko, Ceremony (New York, 1977)

Instructional Notes

You have already read and written about one other contemporary Native American novel, James Welch's Winter in the Blood (Lesson 6), and many of the introductory comments for that lesson pertain to Leslie Silko's Ceremony as well. If it has been some time since you worked Lesson 6, please review both its instructional notes, the Appendix "What to Say About Fiction," and your own written responses for that lesson.

Also, you may see a connection between the three-part structure of The Way to Rainy Mountain (Lesson 3) and Ceremony. Both books (and much other modern Native American literature) are informed by a combination of legend or myth, history, and personal narratives. The earlier Black Elk Speaks is also a blend of these three parts, and some modern poetry in the anthology Carriers of the Dream Wheel is informed by the authors' multiple consciousness: they may see the world not only through the conventional perspectives of history and autobiography, but also through the traditions of the past, like the myths and legends that not too long ago were the only shared verbal heritage among the Native Americans. With the cultural blending of the 20th century, Indian authors like Momaday, Welch, and Silko may write "layered" narratives using both conventional plots, character development, and stylistic techniques and also the traditional subjects and methods of legends and myths.

In Ceremony the traditional literature is present in the Laguna stories such as those of the good and bad harvest seasons and the witchcraft origin of white people. Throughout there are also legendary stories of culture figures like Pollen Boy, the Gambler, the Hummingbird, and Spiderwoman. The historical context is World War II and its aftermath, a period in which many Native Americans like Tayo (and the hero of Momaday's House Made of Dawn) were uprooted from their more or less stable lives, given an exciting taste of white culture, and then dumped back into their past, neither acculturated to white life nor quite able to resume their old lives. In this novel, the theme of alienation is additionally emphasized by the fact that the hero Tayo is a half-breed, even more uncertain of his identity and purpose in life than his full-blood Indian peers. In his quest for understanding and self-realization, the novel particularizes the more general cultural theme, and Silko brings the three layers of the story together--the mythic, the historical, and the personal.

Lesson 8

The themes of the importance of place, the value of the past and of traditional family bonds, time as cyclical rather than progressive, the potential holiness and mystery of all of the natural world and all of the creatures in it, the concept of "the way" (like Black Elk's good red road), and the ambivalence of culture heroes like the trickster ought all to be familiar to you by now, and in Silko's novel you should expect to find traces of these themes, as well as the ones already mentioned (the quest for identity, the dilemmas and conflicts created by inter-cultural life, and the search for roots and stability). If, indeed, all of these themes are present to some degree in Ceremony, it is a virtual encyclopedia of most of the major themes of modern Native American literature. Yet there is one other theme that we have seen not only in the modern literature but also in the traditional (or pre-white) literature. Do you recall what it is, particularly as it was illustrated in the traditional poetry? What clue do the first two pages of Ceremony provide? (Reread them before you continue these notes.)

The author herself said that Ceremony "is essentially about the powers inherent in the process of storytelling." Such an idea takes us back to the early incantatory oral prayer literature in which each word was holy, and each was related to a concept of godliness ("In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."--John, Chapter I). Yet Silko advances no particular faith beyond that of belief in the curative, restorative power of words in the form of stories. In the midst of self-serving political diatribe, the commercial promotions of advertising, and the hollow rhetoric of cults and movements of every sort, such an intention directs us to a refreshingly different view of life and hope for it. Language--the unique human power--can be a tool of aggression and deceit, but it can also be a tool to realize--to articular and understand--all those powerful themes cited above. And is not the mere saying of them important? Talk need not be cheap, as one maxim puts it.

Stories are civilizing forces. On page one, Silko alerts us to what she is about to begin: she herself, the Storyteller (incidentally, Storyteller is the title of Silko's latest book), is the Thought-Woman whose thinking is creating, whose mere naming of creatures is such a powerful force that it creates them. Thus, there is a reality to literature that we commonly ignore, becoming illusioned with business and work and material reality that we mistake for the only reality, believing in appearance, working and perhaps even dying for them.

From word to story to ceremony to Ceremony and its 275 pages is the progression we may follow:

I will tell you something about stories...
They aren't just entertainment.
Don't be fooled.
They are all we have, you see,
all we have to fight off
illness and death.

You don't have anything
if you don't have the stories....

The only cure
I know
is a good ceremony...

Thus, Silko's words, which are a story, begin, and her story is about ceremony. Near the beginning, Tayo literally uses a story to give "strength" (p. 11). And it is with words and references to story and ceremony that the novel also ends, Old Grandma saying "It seems like I already heard these stories before" and a ceremonial prayer-like statement, as of the storyteller concluding a narrative which is an offering (tying into the single-word invocation of page 4):

Sunrise,
accept this offering,
Sunrise.

Writing Assignments

Write on the last question that follows and any combination of the others that totals about 2000 words.

1. Review the statement about themes in paragraph 4 of these instructional notes. Write an analysis of one of the themes as it is illustrated and developed in the novel; indicate where and how the theme is used in the novel. (About 500 words)

2. Some cultures tend to see life dualistically--divided into opposites or pairs. Sex is male or female. The earth contrasts with the sky. Conduct is good or bad, legal or illegal. Food is edible or inedible. Choices are either-or. What dualities seem to be particularly important in Ceremony? Choose one of them to comment upon. (About 250 words)

3. In what way is it important to see that femaleness is the source of a different kind of power that the men in the novel (many of them leading or wishing to lead macho lives) need to understand and acquire? Cite some of the important episodes or characters that illustrate the curative and regenerating powers of women. (About 300 words)

4. Are some parts of the novel unrealized for you (as they are for some other reviewers who, for instance, questioned "obviously contrived" and "ostentatiously 'symbolic'" parts or criticized the lack of development in the characterizations of Tayo's "drinking buddies")? If so, describe a relatively short passage that bothers or puzzles you. Consider if Silko has some reason or excuse for her method, and suggest an alternate "solution" to her presentation. (About 250 words)

5. How successfully does Silko blend the conventional narrative with the traditional parts? Choose a passage such as pp. 48-50, 55-56, or 59-61 as an illustration. Explain how the part set up typographically differently (the way poetry usually is) is related to what precedes and follows it. If the unconventional or legendary parts were not included, how would the overall story be changed? (About 500 words)

6. Sickness and illness--both physical and spiritual--are recurrent throughout the novel, just as ceremony or references to them are. Write an essay in which you trace the relationship between them. For instance, there are references to the Gallup Ceremonials (pp. 10 and 170) and the Scalp Ceremony (p. 177). What are other ceremonies? Especially note what Betonie says about ceremonies (e.g., pp. 132-133). How can they be curative? How can this novel itself be curative? (About 1000 words)

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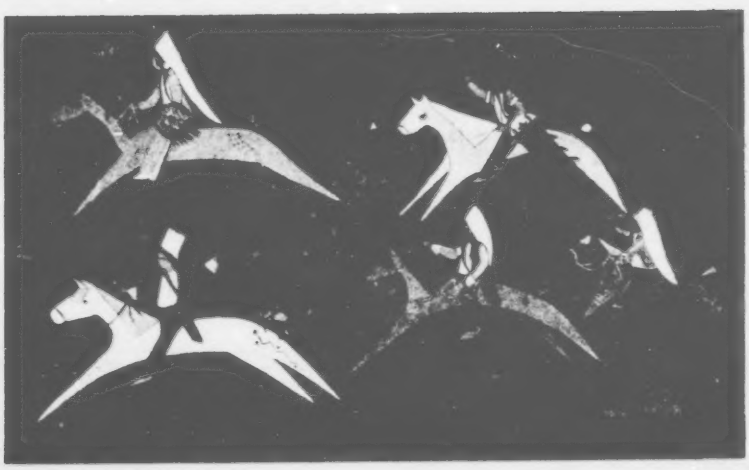

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APPENDIX

WHAT TO SAY ABOUT FICTION

by Robert W. Lewis

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This outline is merely a tool of analysis, and being put in the form of questions, it should constantly remind its user that only he or she can provide the answers. We hope we can talk to one another about literature and exchange informed and reasoned opinions about it, but if a given work of fiction is to mean anything to us, if we are to feel and know it completely, we must at one stage wrestle with the work bare-handed, without others as guides or informants. If one were to answer in detail each of the following questions, one would most certainly understand and, I hope, feel the work thoroughly. Not every question is relevant to every work; and in many cases complete answers will overlap with other ones. Also the good reader may well devise new questions to help one examine special kinds of fiction such as science fiction or black humor. The short story, while like the novel in many respects, is a distinct form for which all these questions will not be relevant. In general, however, these questions should alert the reader beforehand and afterward help one to verbalize or conceptualize one's thoughts and feelings, whether of the short story or the novel.

Only in section I, the questions about historical background, would the reader need any source other than the work itself to arrive at answers. And this section should clearly and emphatically be considered as what it is: mere background to the work itself. For some critical purposes, these questions can be ignored altogether, and in other cases such questions might be answered <u>after</u> a thorough analysis based on the other sections. Quite often, an introduction or preface will provide answers to these questions, but literary reference works, histories, and biographies, as well as the author's own comments in his journals, letters, essays, or autobiography, may sometimes provide useful information that may then be tested against the integrity of the work itself as the reader understands it.

To paraphrase Socrates, "The unexamined story is not worth reading." These questions should help one to answer the larger and older questions that, for all their commonplaceness, are still fundamental: What is the author trying to do? How has he done it? and Was it worth doing? Ultimately, we should not shun judgment of the story, but we should be certain through our analytical but sympathetic inquiry that we have opened our minds to a unique creation and tried to understand it and feel it on its own terms.

I. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

A. When was the work written? What relation or significance does this date have to preceding, contemporary, and succeeding events--biographical events, literary publications, and important political, economic, or social occurrences? Is the author qualified to treat the subject? Is he or she biased or inaccurate?

B. Does the story significantly relate to the work of other writers or to source materials?

C. What place does the story hold in the author's total work?

D. Are any circumstances of special interest associated with the composition of the work? Do these circumstances in any way aid in the better understanding of the story itself?

E. Are all the historical allusions clear? How extensive are they?

F. Do they seem to date the work or do they add a significant dimension of meaning? If so, how and to what extent?

G. Does the author make any useful comments concerning this story or his or her work in general in his or her letters, essays, journals, autobiography?

II. PLOT

A. Can you give a brief synopsis of the story?

B. Does the plot grow out of characters or out of chance or coincidence? Within its own terms, is it logical and believable?

C. Is there a well unified beginning, middle, and end? At the beginning do we learn what happened, to whom it happened, when it happened, and where it happened?

D. Is there a strong center of interest and how is it determined: by the author's statements (but beware the "intentional fallacy") or by space, emphasis, and recurrence? Is there a central crucial episode or is the plot episodic with no more outstanding event?

E. If there is more than one action in the story, which is the main plot and which the subordinate plots (sub-plots)?

F. Is anything seemingly irrelevant to the main plot? If so, does it serve any purpose?

G. What is the nature of the conflict (or conflicts)? Are there complications to the main problem? Identify the protagonist and the antagonist. Where is the climax or turning point?

H. Is our curiosity aroused? How?

I. What of dilemmas, irony, foreshadowing, flashbacks?

J. Is the conclusion satisfactory? Does the story end with a bang or a whimper?

K. Is the title a good one? Is it helpful in any way?

III. SETTING

A. What is the historic time, place, and social background of the story?

B. Has the setting any influence on plot or characters?

C. Are any scenes especially appropriate for the action that takes place there?

D. Is there any use of symbolism in the setting? (Cf. H.)

E. How much time does the action cover? How does the author treat time gaps?

F. Which are the most interesting, striking, or important scenes? How does the author handle them?

G. How is the setting presented? With photographic detail? Impressionistically through a few suggestive details? Indirectly through thoughts and actions?

H. Is the setting detailed or generalized? Realistic or stylized? Is it thematically functional or casual, arbitrary, or atmospheric? (Would it make any difference if the story were set someplace else?) Is the setting allegorical or symbolical or merely literal?

IV. CHARACTERS

A. Can you sum up the appearance and important characteristics of each major character?

B. Are there any marked similarities or contrasts among the characters? (Cf. F.)

C. Are they "masters of their fate" or "victims of circumstance"?

D. Which characters change as the story proceeds? Do they change for the better or the worse? (Cf. H.)

E. Which characters are distinct individuals (round) and which are types (flat)?

F. Does every character have a function in the story? What are the functions of the minor characters? (Any foils?) Are these minor characters interesting in themselves?

G. How are the principal characters presented? By the author's description and comment? By representation of the thoughts and actions of the characters themselves? By observations and comments of the other characters?

H. Are the characters at once realistically consistent and also sufficiently motivated for whatever change occurs in them?

I. Toward which characters does the author show sympathy? Toward which antipathy?

J. Are the characters' names suitable or in any way significant? (Characternyms?)

V. STYLE

A. What are the outstanding qualities or features of the style?

B. How would you describe the author's style? Simple and clearcut, complex and involved? Smooth and graceful, abrupt and harsh? Richly suggestive and implying much, lean and direct? Poetic, sentimental, restrained? Literal or figurative? Concrete or abstract? Specific or general? Formal or informal or colloquial? Consistent or variable?

C. Does the author's style have individuality? Could another of the author's stories be recognized by style alone?

D. Is there any humor in the story? Is it quiet or broad?

E. Is the dialog appropriate to the speakers?

F. How frequent are dramatic situations? How are they reached, by anticipation or surprise? How treated, by suggestion or in detail? How rendered, by dialog or by description?

G. Are there any different rates of movement in the story? Where and why?

H. Do you note abuse of digression?

I. From what point of view is the story written? Is the point of view consistent? Could it have been changed for the better?

1. Omniscient

a. Editorial omniscient: author present as narrator and commentator who summarizes, analyzes, interprets.

b. Neutral omniscient: author narrates but does not comment directly; but the author may use a spokesman character.

2. Limited

a. Third person narration, but point of view of a single character; roving narrator, a variation.

b. First-person narrator is the protagonist.

c. First-person narrator is a minor character or merely an onlooker (Lubbock's "central intelligence").

3. Wholly dramatic narration (effaced narrator--extremely rare). What are the discernible reasons for the choice of the particular point of view? The effects of the choice?

J. Are any of the sentences or paragraphs particularly striking, meaningful, or remarkable for their freshness of statement?

K. From the many possibilities, what materials has the author selected and what does the author's selectivity indicate?

L. What kind of action or scene does the author choose to expand? What kind to dramatize and what kind to narrate? What is the significance of his or her selection?

M. What effects does the author's style produce: atmosphere or mood (effect on reader); tone (author's attitude toward the material); irony; understatement; hyperbole; sentimentality.

VI. CLASSIFICATION

A. On what levels can the story profitably be read? (Plot, character, emotional effect, theme?) Is this story of character with the primary interest being in personalities? Of action, primary interest in events? Of setting, primary interest in environment? Of idea, primary interest in thesis or ethical significance?

B. What is the theme or total meaning of the story? Do all the elements support that meaning? Are there other comments of significance--i.e., minor themes? Does the author raise questions or try to solve them? Is what the author says worth saying? (Beware, however, of reduction, distortion, or inflation of the story by a specific statement of theme.)

C. What is the ideological climate of the story? What ideas seem to be unconscious assumptions of the author and thus operate tacitly? What ideas become subject matter by being themes? And how are they presented, discursively or dramatically?

D. In what general literary tradition was the story written? Realistic: attempting to see life as it is with emphasis on the difficulties, absurdities, animalities, and ironies? Romantic: attempting to see larger truths beyond the literal and factual with emphasis on the imagination and sentiment? Naturalistic, fantastic, symbolistic, allegorical, picaresque, etc.?

E. Does the author make use of allegory, parable, symbolism, or myth?

F. Can you now make a judgment of the story?